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New Media is a Joke: Tracing Irony, Satire, and Remediation in Online Discourse

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New Media is a Joke: Tracing Irony, Satire, and Remediation in Online Discourse

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Dedication

To those that find humor where it is least expected and most needed.

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In the *Philosophy of Literary Form,* Kenneth Burke asks the reader to "imagine that you enter a parlor" as a metaphor for the unending conversations that shapes one's life. This dissertation is the product of these endless conversations, many of them in actual parlors, with individuals so numerous that I can only hope to provide a sampling of those who have helped me to "put in my oar." These are the people and places that have proven invaluable to the project contained in the following pages.

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New Media is a Joke: Tracing Irony, Satire, and Remediation in Online Discourse

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The social and political function of humor in any era is to provide commentary, insight, and catharsis into the concerns facing that time. In this dissertation I investigate the role humor, particularly irony and satire, plays in informing public discourse and civic participation in the contemporary Internet age. This age is often characterized a highly mediated one with the proliferation of increasingly powerful, and increasingly mobile, media an ongoing concern of communication scholars. Understanding how these new forms refashion public discourse to address new contexts is important. In order to understand these differences it is necessary to understand how newer media work in relation to older media. I contend this relationship can be understood through the trope of irony. More importantly irony shares a relationship to the rhetorical process of remediation, whereby newer media are placed in a dialectic relationship with older media. For rhetorical and media scholars these relationships represent an opportunity to understand new possibilities for discursive action. This dissertation provides answers to three questions. What is the relationship between irony and remediation? How can mediated texts of humor illustrate the relationships between irony and remediation?

What rhetorical implications might these relationships have for communication scholars interested in civic engagement, political participation, and mass mediated public discourse?

I argue that remediation, the underlying rhetorical structure of media, is ironic. This structure is best revealed through analysis of highly mediated humorous texts. To answer these questions I conduct a rhetorical analysis of several case studies using irony and remediation as guiding theoretical mechanisms. Each case study focuses on a text characterized as ironic, though not necessarily humorous. I illustrate how irony contributes to the creation of multiple, and often contradictory, meanings in a text while remediation illustrates how media forms influence the creation of increasingly fragmented texts. When combined in a rhetorical analysis these mechanisms work to reveal underlying ideological concerns prevalent in public discourse in an age of new media. The significance of these concerns, and their relationship to irony, satire, and humor is discussed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Upon the May 1, 2011 announcement that Osama bin Laden had been located, millions across the United States and the world responded with an outpouring of emotion and disbelief. News reports cut to scenes of college kids storming in front of the White House celebrating as if they had all just graduated and landed dream jobs. The addition of Geraldo Rivera, sent in to interview these students for their reactions and sense of historical perspective, was among the first of many highly mediated moments in aftermath of the death of the person responsible for the attacks of 9/11. Discussions started almost immediately about what to make of not only this spectacle but also the fact that bin Laden had been living for nearly 6 years in a compound in a densely populated area of Abottabad, Pakistan, with both Pakistani and US troops within several hundred yards.

Less than 24 hours after President Obama announced the death of bin Laden Google had already identified the hideout and marked the location on their digital maps. The map provided a high-resolution glimpse of the location of one of the world's most wanted men. One of the features of the site is that users are able to post comments about tagged locations. This feature was largely intended for individuals to post customer reviews of local businesses, similar to product reviews found on other major websites like Amazon. Within days several thousand comments had been posted. Given the international notoriety of the story, the complex political associations, and implications for US foreign policy it would stand to reason that comments left at the web location of the bin Laden compound would be similarly varied. Yet as the UK Daily Mail reported,

"It never takes long for the comedians to come out even after historical moments of national security" (Daily Mail, 2011). Nearly every comment was humorous. More importantly, nearly every comment used irony as the basis for humor. Writing as if the secret hiding location of Osama bin Laden were a resort, users posted comments typically found when reviewing hotel destinations. A user by the name of "Ken" wrote,

> Location, location, location. It's close to everything, only drawback was that there was no telephone or internet. Highly recommend this place if you want to 'get away from it all,' meet the locals, or just sit back and enjoy the scenery. It's got 18 foot walls, so privacy is almost guaranteed, almost ("No Wifi but Reliable," 2011).

Not to be outdone by the commentary on the reported details of the compound and how it was uncovered another user aptly named "James Bond" commented "**Pakistani Hospitality at its BEST!** Having lived on the run throughout most of my life, nothing says 'Criminal Safe Haven' like Pakistan."[1] While many of these responses employed a certain tongue-in-cheek quality, others were a bit more explicit in their references to the operation by Seal Team 6 in assassinating the Al Qaeda leader. One comment posted on the page explains, "When we got here for our honeymoon, there was debris ALL over the yard and brass shells inside and out...turns out someone had spilled spaghetti sauce on the rugs and the maids were nowhere to be found" ("Osama Bin Laden's Compound," n.d.).

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[1] Both comments taken from ones included in the UK Daily mail article

[2] Additionally, the negotiation of contradictory yet mutually dependent concepts is the defining rhetorical characteristic of irony, which will be further explained in a later section.

What is striking about this example is the formal layout of the site was used to create an ongoing joke. The humorous characterization of the compound as a resort is influenced in part by the medium; a web site that generally invites reviews of products and services is now adapted to display the location of a wanted fugitive. The number of comments left on the site, more than 1400 currently, suggest that viewers not only recognized the irony at work in these reviews but also were encouraged to enter their own. More importantly these humorous responses occurred in the context of a major political event, one that had profound implications for US foreign policy and domestic politics alike. That the overwhelmingly common response to this event was to crack jokes by playing with the formal characteristics of web site is important. On the one hand this is nothing new. Sigmund Freud wrote in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* that jokes operate in a manner akin to dreams, allowing individuals to process their experiences of the world. On the other hand this joking is not "merely playing with ideas" (Freud, 1960, p. 7) in a frivolous sense. The comments left on the page are decidedly ironic; they imply a meaning opposite or counter to what is written. What those meanings may be is a matter of rhetorical importance. Given that so many similar comments were posted within 24 hours of Google revealing the location, and with those comments continuing to trickle in more than 3 years later, one might ask: "Why such a cynical response to such a profound political moment?"

It is not difficult to envision such a question as a plausible reaction to the comments left on the Bin Laden Compound site. Asserting a communicative act as ironic often implies cynicism or detachment, working in opposition to a more serious or

thoughtful response. Roger Rosenblatt famously wrote in *Time* magazine that the attacks of 9/11 signaled an end to "the age of irony." He writes, "The ironists seeing through everything, made it difficult for anyone to see anything. The consequence of thinking that nothing is real--apart from prancing around in an air of vain stupidity--is that one will not know the difference between a joke and a menace" (2001, p. 79). This indictment of an apparent culture of detachment and complacency struck a familiar chord with individuals struggling with the rhetorical significance of such a catastrophic event. This mentality also finds traction within academic circles. For example, political communication scholars have claimed the increased prevalence of political humor, often characterized as detached and ironic, is correlated with an increased sense of cynicism toward civic engagement (Hart & Hartelius, 2007; Hariman, 2007; Bennett, 2008). Similarly, Cloud (2011) argues that ironic enjoyment of mediated texts enables an audience to essentially have it both ways, a "production of investment through disinvestment" (p. 415). With the "oscillation of investment and irony among viewers of a text" (415) irony is placed in opposition to engagement and akin to detachment. Rhetors and audiences alike are at best engaged in smug critical distance from a text's ideological commitments, at worst complicit in the perpetuation of hegemonic discourses.

I disagree. Rather than ponder why irony as a cynical or detached response to the contemporary media environment is so prevalent I am instead concerned with whether or not irony *should* be characterized as such. That is, a more productive question is: Should irony be characterized as a rhetorical strategy of disengagement? My short answer is no. It is my position, and one that I will repeatedly argue in this dissertation, that

characterizing irony as a rhetoric of disengagement is incomplete. This incomplete characterization is especially important when considering the prevalence of irony in new media discourses. I argue that placing irony alongside notions of disengagement and detachment neglects the role of *irony as a rhetorical structure* underlying public discourse in an era of new media. The increase in the presence of ironic humor in mediated texts since 9/11 suggest as much. Contrasting Rosenblatt's pronouncement Viveca Greene notes, "irony has enjoyed something of a renaissance since its short-lived death after 9/11" (2011, p. 134).

However, I am not claiming that 9/11 *caused* the development of new media technologies and accompanying discursive structures. Rather the *mediation* of 9/11 *revealed* the rhetorical relationships enabled/constrained by the experience and reflection of the event through highly mediated texts. The opening example of the bin Laden compound jokes is but one example that indicates such relationships remain pervasive and ongoing. Jeffrey Melnick notes that 9/11 is a defining cultural formation of the Internet age, arguing, "A consensus has developed that the events of 9/11 contributed to the rapid development of Web 2.0 in the early twenty-first century" (p. 13). Similarly, Giselinde Kuipers argues the development of Web 2.0 and widespread dissemination of 9/11 jokes were articulated alongside one another (2011). Humor scholar Ted Gournelos (2011) continues, "in almost all scholarly (and even lay) discussions of the attacks and their immediate aftermath, 9/11 is one of the most media-saturated events in history, and is remarkable as much for the quick consolidation of images into a particular narrative as it is for the sheer volume of coverage" (p. 84). This saturation is where the focus on

mediation and humor, particularly ironic humor, holds the most potential to illuminate prominent discursive features of the contemporary media environment. I argue many of the most culturally visible humorous texts widely circulated on the Internet during the time period credited with the proliferation of Web 2.0 technologies were either responses to the events of 9/11 or political concerns stemming from its aftermath.

This opening example highlights several terms that will be my main concern throughout this project: irony, mediation, politics, and humor. My main focus is on the role of irony in new media discourses, specifically its relationship to the concept of remediation. Defined by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin as "the representation of one medium in another" that is "a defining characteristic of the new digital media" (2000, p.45), remediation provides a theoretical explanation of the paradoxical relationships underlying how newer media develop in relation to older media and how individuals negotiate those relationships when using media. Since irony works via a back and forth among rhetors, audiences, and meanings I argue that irony is a fundamental rhetorical structure underlying these paradoxical relationships. These relationships are of value for scholars interested in political communication, public sphere theory, and mass mediated public discourse. This position assumes that mediated communicative action is rhetorical rather than determinist, and that humorous texts are ideal to illustrate such relationships because of their own relationship to irony.

Public sphere scholar Robert Glenn Howard (2010) notes the ideological commitments of a given era manifest themselves in the discursive features of communication technologies developed in the same era. By extension, humorous texts

stemming from the same era would then address these same commitments. Humorous texts that respond to highly politicized events will themselves be invested in political meaning. Furthermore, Viveca Greene argues that post 9/11 is "a time when ironic/satirical texts are widely popular and widely circulated" (Greene, 2011, p. 134). If such a characterization is accurate then I argue irony as a rhetorical structure would be embedded in the discursive features of the technologies used to create such texts. Given that these mediated texts "emerge from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts" (Bolter and Grusin, 2000, p.19) it is necessary to understand the rhetorical structures that influence such contexts.

With these issues in mind, I propose the following research questions to guide this dissertation:

RQ1: What is the relationship between irony and remediation?

RQ2: How can mediated texts of humor illustrate the relationships between irony and remediation?

RQ3: What rhetorical implications might these relationships have for communication scholars interested in civic engagement, political participation, and mass mediated public discourse?

I argue that remediation, as a rhetorical structure underlying mediated public discourse, is ironic. Humorous mediated texts are uniquely suited to investigate irony as a rhetorical structure because of their own characterization as ironic. Scholars of political communication, public sphere theory, and humor will find these investigations noteworthy because they are related to several relevant issues in those literatures. To

illustrate these opportunities and how I plan to address them in this dissertation I will first provide working definitions to several terms used throughout this dissertation. Next I review relevant literatures in political communication, public sphere, and humor studies with a focus on how irony and remediation could benefit each. I conclude with a chapter outline of how I plan to investigate these relationships through rhetorical analysis of relevant texts.

DEFINING TERMS: HUMOR, PARODY, SATIRE, IRONY, AND REMEDIATION

Much of the scholarship on humor, parody, satire, and irony uses the terms somewhat interchangeably. They certainly are related yet not synonymous, a difficult situation that has not gone unnoticed in academic literature (Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009). For the purposes of clarification I offer a definition of terms in this section. I will operationally define "humor" as a catchall term that organizes the terms "parody," "satire," and "irony" used throughout this dissertation. Parody, satire, and irony then operate as specific *types* of humor. They rely on various discursive mechanisms to enable the possibility of laughter, though laughter need not specifically be present for discursive features to operate successfully.

Parody

Parody is a discursive strategy of mimicry. Parodic humor relies on a play on form, with laughter stemming from the recognition of the form being imitated. This is different from imitation in that often it is the juxtaposition of one form with another that creates a "perspective by incongruity" (Burke, 1984b). The recognition of one rhetorical

form operating within another rhetorical form creates the possibility for not only laughter in the recognition, but also the possibility for rethinking how each rhetorical form operates. This is because "parody, as such, is a media literacy educator," it plays with generic conventions of discourse so that readers may "have added tools for making sense of it" (Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009, p. 18). In parody, laughter stems from the recognition of two or more rhetorical forms influencing one another, a distinction sharing similarities with the definition of remediation.

Satire

Satire can be understood as a perspective more than a specific strategy. It is admittedly a close cousin of parody, causing much confusion in popular discussions of the terms. Gray, Jones, and Thompson note, "Everyday vernacular often treats parody as synonymous with satire, but not all parody is satiric" (2009, pp. 16-17). The reason for this confusion is that satire may make use of parody but is done for the specific purpose of social commentary or criticism. It is for this reason that satire is often considered humor's "most overtly political genre" (p. 11). Satire is often studied in the context of political communication. For example, *The Colbert Report* is often understood as satire because of the ways the humor of the show is directed at a target, namely *Fox News* pundit Bill O'Reilly. Furthermore I position satire as more of a perspective of the rhetor than a rhetorical strategy to employ, akin to Kenneth Burke's characterization of satire as a poetic category (1984a). Whereas parody focuses on the interplay of form and the recognition of different perspectives enabled by these juxtapositions, satire intends to direct an audience toward a specific judgment (Hutcheon, 2004).

Irony

Irony is perhaps the most complex of the terms, often characterized as both rhetorical strategy and rhetorical trope. In this proposal I place an emphasis on the latter because my focus is on how elements of humor are embedded in the discursive features of new media. To clarify irony here I adopt the perspective of both Kenneth Burke (1969a) and Linda Hutcheon (2004), defining irony as a trope the structures a wide range of discursive action. Specifically I align with Burke's characterization that,

> Irony arises when one tries, by interaction of terms upon one another, to produce a *development* which uses all the terms. Hence, from a standpoint of this total form (this 'perspective of perspectives'), none of the participating 'sub-perspectives can be treated as precisely right or precisely wrong. They are all voices, or personalities, or positions, integrally affecting one another (1969a, p. 512).

Unlike the rhetorical strategy of parody or the orientation of satire, irony operates on a structural level. It manifests in the negotiation of the tensions between multiple perspectives, tensions that are never fully resolved. Though irony may underlie parody and satire, I define it more at the level of form than content. However, given that irony also operates as a rhetorical strategy I acknowledge its dual role at multiple points in this study.

Remediation

Remediation is understood in this dissertation as the underlying rhetorical structure of media. This structure is defined by its relational quality. Defined by Jay

David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000) as the "representation of one medium in another" (45) or "the mediation of mediation" (55) *re*-mediation is the newest of terms used in this study and some background is needed. Bolter and Grusin formulated the idea of remediation to explain the paradoxical relationships underlying individual interactions with technologically mediated communication. For Bolter and Grusin, "what is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media" (15). These discursive relationships operate via twin logics of *immediacy* and *hypermediacy* that are both contradictory and mutually dependent. Immediacy is the process of erasure, the creation of transparency through the denial of the mediating technology. Immediacy is counterbalanced by the logic of hypermediacy, or the fascination with the very medium creating the sense of erasure. The paradox of this relationship is that they are mutually dependent; one cannot operate without the other despite their logical contradictions. Bolter and Grusin write, "media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media" (55). The fascination with any new technology is tied to the ability to recognize the ways in which mediation becomes increasingly transparent. While certainly containing trace influences of Marshal McLuhan I contend remediation is more rhetorical than determinist in how it structures mediated discursive action. That is, these issues are best investigated from a rhetorical rather than media ecology perspective. This is because the discursive features of any media form must be understood in relation to previous media, and vice versa. These negotiations are best understood as rhetorical phenomena.

And as I argue throughout this dissertation that rhetorical structure is ironic. Bolter and Grusin explain that while remediation does not necessarily originate with the proliferation of Web 2.0, "We are in an unusual position to appreciate remediation, because of the rapid response by traditional media…to reaffirm their status within our culture as digital media challenge that status" (p. 5). A relevant example is the cable news broadcast where "televised news programs feature multiple video streams, split-screen displays, composites of graphic and text" (6) that mimics the visual display of a website. Print media is refashioned to respond to challenges in digital media as well, as evidenced by the redesigned print version of the USA Today to more closely resemble its website (Moos, 2012).

To sum up the distinctions: Parody is a rhetorical strategy that derives humor through juxtapositions of form. Satire operates at the level of orientation, the deployment of parody for the explicit purposes of critique. Irony functions mainly as a rhetorical trope, structuring discursive action (including various types of humor) in the negotiation of tensions between multiple perspectives. Remediation is the mutually dependent logics of immediacy and hypermediacy that underscore interactions with media. In the next section I review relevant literatures in political communication, public sphere and humor, paying specific attention to spaces where irony and remediation should be incorporated.

LITERATURE REVIEW: POLITICAL COMMUNICATION, PUBLIC SPHERE, AND RHETORICS OF HUMOR

At the heart of this literature review is the contention that the current media landscape, characterized by the spread of the Internet in creating what has come to be termed "new media", rests on a major paradox. By paradox I am referring to the notion of contradictory ideas that share some sort of mutually dependent relationship.[2] For now I identify the paradox of the current media landscape as follows: Individuals have access to more information than any other time in history yet misinformation abounds and civic participation seems to have stagnated (Mindich, 2005). Particularly in the relation to politics scholars have noted the sheer wealth of information is correlated with a decrease in democratic deliberation. Stroud (2010) notes that one consequence of an increasingly fractured media environment is the tendency to selectively expose oneself to information that confirms predisposed political positions, increasing polarization and stymying democratic deliberation. Cass Sunstein (2007) characterized this phenomenon as the "echo chamber," where individuals are increasingly exposed only to repeated and magnified versions of beliefs they already hold. Conversely Jodi Dean (2002) argues that the availability of information creates a state of perpetual deliberation where democratic participation is limited precisely because individuals act as if more information is always needed.[3] In any case, *this paradox is ripe for humor because humor often stems from the*

[2] Additionally, the negotiation of contradictory yet mutually dependent concepts is the defining rhetorical characteristic of irony, which will be further explained in a later section.

[3] One of the most prominent examples of this paradox is the rise of the so-called "fact checking" phenomenon. In a media environment where individuals presumably have access to all relevant

juxtaposition of incommensurable ideas. While humor has long been a part of the media landscape since the dawn of the television age (and certainly well before) the increasingly fractured media environment, coupled with the speed at which information circulates via the Internet, only heightens the impact of such contradictory yet mutually dependent ideas. Humor, particularly ironic humor, is uniquely suited to investigate the discursive features of such an environment because it holds potential to highlight these contradictions. I proceed by identifying three bodies of literature invested in this paradox and identify their relationship to irony and remediation. These are political communication, public sphere theory, and the rhetoric of humor. I admit that while I attempt to survey each of the literatures in isolation of one another there will be areas of overlap that I will acknowledge.

Political Communication

Studies of humor from a political communication perspective tend to focus on issues of cynicism, civic engagement, and shifting media paradigms. In the last 15 years scholars of political communication have filled the pages of journals and the dockets of book publishers with quantitative and qualitative examinations of the effects of political humor, especially on mass mediated communication practices (Smith & Voth, 2002; Young, 2006, 2008; Bennett, 2007; Hariman, 2007; Hart & Hartelius, 2007; Brewer & Cao, 2008; Baym, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009; Xenos & Becker, 2009; LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009, Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011). Upon first glance the

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information on issues the need for constant verification seems antithetical to the democratic promises of the Internet.

increase in scholarly attention can be attributed to an increase in popularity. While it is true that *Saturday Night Live* has been parodying politicians for nearly 40 years, with shows like *Rowan and Martin's Laugh In* and the *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* doing the same before that, the turn of the century marked another shift in the attention given to political humor. While *Saturday Night Live* continues to figure in to discussions of humor and politics the bulk of the focus has been on Comedy Central programming, particularly *The Daily Show, The Colbert Report, Southpark,* and *Chappelle's Show* as well as hybrid print/online publications such as *The Onion* (Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2008; Achter, 2008; Waisanen, 2011).

Television shows like *The Daily Show*, and *South Park*, along with satirical newspaper *The Onion* existed well before the media/cultural environment stemming from 9/11 yet took on a heightened relevance as their humor became increasingly cynical toward dominant media narratives offered after the attacks. *The Colbert Report*, an offshoot of *The Daily Show*, premiered during the height of the George W. Bush Presidency and was almost immediately responsible for a series of highly publicized, and widely viewed, media spectacles satirizing politicians and the media. Much of this satire has been noted for its relationship to Web 2.0 practices (Baym, 2009; Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009; Faina, 2013). *The Onion* in particular has been widely praised not only for its near perfect parody of newspaper conventions but also in its ability to create a web presence that rivals major news outlets (Kessler, 2011). Similarly Geoffrey Baym (2009) notes that the impact of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* is largely due to the way their humor blends discursive practices of both the era of televised cable news and those

of the emerging online news environment. While not explicitly making the link himself, I note that Baym is alluding to the notion that their humor is an expression of remediation identified by Bolter and Grusin (2000). To give a fuller picture of the major issues involving humor and political communication I identify three areas most relevant to this study. They are cynicism, partisanship, and shifting media paradigms.

First, in *Entertaining Politics*, Jeffrey Jones (2009) draws attention to the increased frequency of television programs that blend entertainment with politics. While political satire has long occupied a space in American television history (Baym, 2009; Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009) scholars have moved to characterize the last decade or so as a decided shift. Like Jones, Mindich (2005) casts this development as a potential strategy to reach an increasingly disenchanted electorate, particularly younger voters. The impact of late night talk shows like *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, *The Late Show with David Letterman* and *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher* are well documented (Jones, 2005; Mindich, 2005; Baumgartner & Morris, 2006, 2008).

By far the most studied political entertainment shows by researchers are *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* (Baym, 2005, 2007, 2009; Jones, 2005; Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Bennett, 2007; Hariman, 2007; Hart & Hartelius, 2007; LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009). One of the most noteworthy conclusions of these studies is that viewers of these shows are more likely to have a greater knowledge of political issues than those who watch traditional news programs.

Scholars moved on to discussions of what to make of this heightened knowledge. A prevailing conclusion was that political humor fostered a cynical attitude that was

characterized as detrimental to American civic participation. Baumgartner and Morris (2006, 2008) found though viewers of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* did in fact have more political knowledge they felt more cynicism toward the political process. Both Bennett (2007) and Hariman (2007) concede that Jon Stewart fosters a sense of cynicism both in his approach and in his viewers. However, rather than fault Stewart for engendering such attitudes they claim the origins of this heightened cynicism lay elsewhere. Instead Jon Stewart inspires cynicism as a necessary response to an increasingly fragmented and vitriolic media climate that itself fosters a cynical attitude. In staking this position, Bennett and Hariman effectively move to characterize cynicism, whether rightly or wrongly attributed to Jon Stewart, as a productive attitude. Baym (2005) extends this position to civic engagement, arguing that since *The Daily Show* presents current events in a manner similar to how viewers make sense of politics in their daily lives it holds the potential to engage audiences in a more effective manner. Yet despite these possibilities voter turnout among younger viewers, often considered *The Daily Show*'s prime demographic, continues to lag behind other groups. If humor is to have an impact on civic participation and democratic deliberation in the contemporary media climate, other modes of participation will have to be considered.

Second, some scholars warn that political humor has unintended partisan effects. Regarding the long tradition of Presidential parodies on *Saturday Night Live* Jones argues that rather than operate under the assumption that political humor levies a cynical rejection of politics, "one might argue that SNL's political humor here is affirming rather than critical" (2009, p. 44). Evidence of this phenomenon exists in more contemporary

settings as well. LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam (2009) note that one's political leanings affect interpretations of political comedy. This is perhaps not entirely surprising as Meyer (2000) notes that humor can be used to both unite and divide groups while Gring-Pemble and Watson (2003) clarify that political satire often has the adverse affect of reaffirming that which it seeks to dismantle. As I argue in this dissertation those issues are more pronounced in the contemporary media environment, placing humor in a unique position to understand hyper partisanship in online settings.

Third, the impact of humor on contemporary public discourse has been used to illustrate shifts in media paradigms. I argue much of the debate over the impact of political humor on mass mediated political communication stems from attempts to incorporate rhetorics of humor into traditional lines of inquiry. The shortcomings of these approaches are that humor occupies a more diverse discursive space than traditional binaries of political communication would allow. In many ways the binaries of hard news/soft news and cynicism/engagement have outlived their usefulness. Instead they have become increasingly intertwined. An example of this is the idea that distinctions between journalism and so-called "fake news" are becoming harder to distinguish (Baym, 2005; Faina, 2013). Several scholars agree. For example, Gray, Jones, & Thompson (2009) characterize late night political humor shows as "Satire TV" a genre of political humor that is markedly different from previous eras of televised comedy. That is, political humor exists as a hybridity between information and entertainment, creating a mutually dependent relationship where each is understood in relation to the other, much like Bolter and Grusin's characterization of remediation. Attempts to push for politically

charged humor as a specific genre of mediated texts permeate much contemporary humor research. In her doctoral dissertation Lisa Glebatis Perks posits that, "critics of humorous texts need to approach them as a unique genre, with a critical lens that accounts for the polysemy inherent in many humorous texts" (2008, p. vii). While not specifically using the term *genre* Geoffrey Baym places Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show* as indicative of a "neo-modern" paradigm of mass mediated public discourse, anchored in the proliferation of new media technologies, where the difference between "news" and "entertainment" are increasingly intertwined and complex (2009). Giselinde Kuipers argues that the proliferation of jokes responding to the events of 9/11, "play with many elements of media culture, but especially with genre, in a highly sophisticated way" (2011, p. 41). At the heart of these discussions of genre are interlocking ideas of integration, polysemy, and hybridity. These discussions are ripe for irony and remediation because they involve texts where a primary rhetorical function is to relate to other texts and uncover contradictory interpretations. For Kuipers unlike previous eras, "the Internet joke has no generic conventions of its own (yet); by definition, it borrows from other genres." (30).

This perspective holds the most significance for my project. Political communication scholars would benefit from understanding how remediation structures the relationship between "newer" and "older" forms of media. Heather Osbourne-Thompson notes, "what were once either entertainment oddities or satiric discourses that sat safely outside the realm of politics are now engaged with on even the most venerated platforms of political journalism. The walls that formerly separated political insiders and outsiders, cable and network, pundits and parodists are now quite permeable" (2009, p.

79). This permeability is also closely linked to relevant discussions in public sphere theory about issues of media, publicity, and democracy. I now turn to those discussions.

Public Sphere Theory

In this section I focus on what I identify are inherent rhetorical tensions in public sphere theory, new communication technologies, and their relation to publicity. In *The Democratic Paradox* Chantal Mouffe argues for a democratic politics that envisions a common symbolic space within this changing political, social and economic reality. Like the previous section on political communication I argue the heart of this literature rests on another, more explicit paradox. Specifically, "liberal democracy results from the articulation of two logics that are incompatible in the last instance and there is no way in which they could be perfectly reconciled" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 5). This paradox also aligns rhetorically with remediation. As previously explained remediation results from the articulation of two logics, immediacy and hypermediacy, that are themselves incompatible but mutually interdependent. In fact, like Bolter and Grusin's positioning of immediacy and hypermediacy in remediation, Mouffe contends that, "instead of trying to erase the traces of power and exclusion, democratic politics requires us to bring them to the fore, to make them visible so that they can enter the terrain of contestation" (p. 34). Mouffe argues for a sense of multiplicity in the symbolic and spatial locations of publicity whereas Bolter and Grusin highlight, "in digital technology… hypermediacy expresses itself as multiplicity" (1998, p. 33). Mouffe's paradox of democracy is important for this project because it underscores relevant areas of public sphere

scholarship in relation to irony and remediation. I identify two areas where these links should be made: Rhetorical tensions inherent in public sphere theory, and new communication technologies.

First, there are tensions inherent in rhetorical scholars' understanding of the bourgeois public sphere that can benefit from an ironic understanding. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* Jurgen Habermas explains that as socioeconomic structures began to shift, "the general rules that governed interaction among private people now became a public concern. In the conflict over this concern, in which the private people soon enough became engaged with the public authority, the bourgeois public sphere attained its political function" (1991, p. 127). When the public sphere exerts control over the private sphere in order to create a shared cohesion among private individuals that shared cohesion creates inevitable conflicts over the scope of those rules. Those private individuals affected by those rules thus respond to the public institutions regarding those concerns, giving them "public" political power. That this political power stems from an ongoing "public" negotiation among "private" individuals indicates that on some level Habermas's conception depends on a mutual interdependency of contradictory positions.

Furthermore, the inherent exclusionary nature of the public sphere rests on a similar ironic tension. Nancy Fraser argues that from its very inception the bourgeois public sphere was built upon a set of rules that excluded certain groups by placing limits on the types and forms of discursive practice permissible in public forums. For example, "a discourse of publicity touting accessibility, rationality, and the suspension of status

hierarchies is itself deployed as a strategy of distinction" (Fraser, 1992, p. 115) that belies the ideal of bracketed status differentials between participants. Since Habermas positions the rise of the bourgeois public sphere as a product of specific historical and economic developments in Europe Fraser contends that the discursive strategies enabled by this formulation are similarly designed to benefit those granted power in those developments. Similar arguments are made by both Bolter and Grusin (2000) and Howard (2010) concerning the ideological commitments of new media technologies in relation to public discourse.

Instead, Fraser argues that Habermas should be revised to address the concerns and realities of actually existing democracies. This was not an argument to supplant Habermas's theory but rather a call for a "critical interrogation and reconstruction if it is to yield a category capable of theorizing the limits of actually existing democracy" (Fraser, p. 111). Fraser called these categories *subaltern counterpublics* that "have a dual character" that "function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics" (p. 124). This idea of "wider publics" is important for this dissertation. Fraser argues that the subaltern counterpublic and these "wider publics" constitute a dialectic tension that "enables subaltern counterpublics partially to offset, although not wholly to eradicate, the unjust participatory privileges enjoyed by members of dominant social attempts in stratified societies" (p. 124). Robert Asen (2000) notes a similar rhetorical structure in his conceptualization of counterpublicity, arguing that any oppositional potential of a counter-public lies not in total isolation but in the ability to

oscillate between isolation and the wider public. Adhering to this position would place publicity and counter-publicity in a contradictory yet mutually dependent relationship.

Finally, irony and remediation hold significance for scholars interested how the public sphere and deliberation are influenced by changes in media technologies. Nicholas Garnham notes one of the major critiques of Habermas's bourgeois public sphere is that a "rationalist model of public discourse leaves him unable to theorize a pluralist public sphere and it leads him to neglect the continuing need for compromise between bitterly divisive and irreconcilable political positions" (1992, p. 360). While such criticisms are more thoroughly addressed by Mouffe, Garnham's major contribution is in how these criticisms relate to various mediated rhetorical forms. He argues, "Habermas's model of communicative action, developed as the norm for public discourse, neglects, when faced by distorted communication, all those other forms of communicative action not directed toward consensus" (p. 360). I would place humor, particularly ironic humor, as one such candidate not directed toward consensus. For Garnham a major downfall of this position is that Habermas "neglects both the rhetorical and playful aspects of communicative action, which leads to too sharp a distinction between information and entertainment" that neglects the link between "citizenship and theatricality" (p. 360). These criticisms are remarkably similar to the debates in political communication literature of what to make of the current trend of political humor. The hard news/soft news binary is certainly implied here, as is the oppositional pairing of cynicism and engagement characteristic of much political humor scholarship.

Public sphere scholars have called for accounting for mediation in rhetorics of publics and counterpublics since the early 1990s (Garnham, 1992). Speculating as to what such changes might consist in an increasingly online environment Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer asked, "To what extent do NCT's (New Communication Technologies) alter the internal rhetorical dynamics of social movements, and to what extent do altered rhetorical dynamics alter organizational forms?" (2001, p. 22). There is ample scholarship taking up this project. Catherine Palczewski argues, "the medium of the Internet problematizes issues of space and time to such an extent that activists and theorists should attend to it" (2001, p. 177). Howard Rheingold (2002) examined the rise in democratic possibilities of mobile communication technology in how they create what he terms "smart mobs." He notes that in "bypassing the complex of broadcasting media, cell phone users themselves became broadcasters" (p. 157). DeLuca and Peeples's (2002) analysis of the ways WTO protestors used increasingly mobile media platforms to effectively disseminate images and information via a "public screen" is but one example of the impacts such changes in media technology have on publicity. Additionally, Robert Glenn Howard identifies the "dawning of the age of participatory media" (2010, p. 240) where blogs and websites create new possibilities for the practice of citizenship. Furthermore, Sheller and Urry (2003) note the ways in which increasingly mobile communication technologies have transformed traditional understandings of "public" and "private" in everyday communication practices. These efforts give credence to calls by scholars, particularly in the area of public sphere scholarship, to account for how technological changes in media affect civic and democratic participation. Given the

focus on what, if any, impacts political humor has on mass mediated public discourse such changes should also be examined in relation to humor.

However, some have cautioned that the democratizing potential of such features is utopian at best, and may actually have the opposite effect of creating increasingly isolated and exclusionary discursive spaces online. Cass Sunstein argues, "there are serious dangers in a system in which individuals bypass general-interest intermediaries and restrict themselves to opinions and topics of their own choosing" (2007, p. 13). With Facebook surpassing more than 150 million users in the U.S. and expected to surpass one billion users worldwide (Emerson, 2012) such concerns are increasingly salient. Sunstein warns that for the survival of a lively, functioning democracy this phenomenon "is likely to produce far worse than mere fragmentation" of ideas (13). The online media environment is one where users both have increased access to a multiplicity of perspectives and are increasingly isolated in gated information communities of their own making. I argue that since contemporary mass mediated humor occupies such a profound place in publics that "mediate between society and the state by holding the state accountable to society via publicity" (Fraser, 1992, p. 112) analyzing contemporary humorous texts creates an important opportunity to understand the changing nature of this mediating role in a rapidly proliferating technological moment.

In order to better understand these relationships I contend that irony and humor cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to a robust public sphere. They do not function as the "entertainment" counterpart opposite "information" nor are they defining characteristics of "soft" news, "cynicism", or "disengagement." Placing irony in such positions in effect

dismisses its potential and central role in revealing important relationships among media, politics, and democratic participation. Instead, understanding the rhetorical similarities between irony and the discursive features of new media can provide a more complete depiction of "the role of the mass media in contemporary democracies" (Garnham, 1992, p. 360). I conclude this literature review by surveying relevant works on rhetoric and humor.

Rhetorical Studies of Humor

In this section I focus largely on the influence of Kenneth Burke in rhetorical studies of humor and how political communication scholars have largely neglected such influences in their own studies of humor. Given that humor is a famously difficult object to study, with multiple interpretations and meanings of a given text, incorporating Burke into rhetorical analysis of humor has been particularly fruitful. A Burkean approach figures in to numerous rhetorical examinations of humor (Carlson, 1988; Meyer, 2000; Smith & Voth, 2002; Buerkle, Mayer, & Olson, 2003; Gring-Pemble & Watson, 2003, Waisanen, 2011). In particular both *Permanence and Change* and *Attitudes Toward History* offer vocabularies that have become touchstones in charting both the rhetorical functions of humor and the perspectives of rhetors that deploy such strategies.

However, while Burke occupies a foundational role in many rhetorical studies of humor explicit references to his work is largely absent in many of the previously mentioned studies on political humor. For example despite having one of the most comprehensive focuses on mass mediated political humor Geoffrey Baym (2005, 2007,

2009) rarely, if ever, cites Burke when discussing humor's rhetorical functions. When discussing the goals of humor, parody, and satire Gray, Jones, & Thompson (2009) neglect a major opportunity to link to Burke, particularly when discussing the difficulties of differentiating among these categories. Neither Gournelos (2011), Greene (2011), nor Kuipers (2011) mention Burke in their discussions of comedy and irony. Kuipers' analysis in particular could benefit from Burkean studies of humor because of her interest in "when genre boundaries become fuzzy" (p. 41). I argue that Burke provides helpful resources to address these concerns. Similarly, while there are political implications stemming from several Burkean studies of humor few of them focus specifically on political texts (Smith & Voth, 2002; Buerkle, Mayer, & Olson, 2003). The connections should be made more explicit. Incorporating Burkean approaches to the study of humor into the realm of political and media communication could help foster a greater understanding of the role humor plays in mass mediated public discourse.

Additionally, Burke's conception of irony is particularly useful to understanding the role of humor in contemporary public discourse. Writing on irony as one of the "Four Master Tropes" in *A Grammar of Motives* Burke characterizes it as synonymous with dialectic whose "role involves properties *both intrinsic* to the agent and developed *in relation* to the scene and other agents" (1969a, p. 511, emphasis mine). Given that political humor is often understood in opposition to other more "serious" forms of news and that many of the rhetorical contradictions of public sphere theory previously outlined discuss tensions between public/private and publicity/counterpublicity this perspective on irony could prove beneficial. Not only is this perspective largely absent in studies of

political humor it aligns with Garnham's warning against making "too sharp a distinction between information and entertainment" (1992, p. 360) when analyzing the role of the mass media in contemporary democracies. I argue that a Burkean perspective be more fully integrated into such analyses.

Furthermore, Burke's theorizing of irony informs other scholarly works on the rhetoric of irony (Booth, 1974; Hutcheon, 2004). Specifically Linda Hutcheon's theory of irony draws upon Burke to make the claim that the relational component of irony is what positions it as a rhetoric of engagement, an explicit counter to conceptions of irony as a strategy of cynical disengagement. She writes, "irony happens as part of a communicative process; it is not a static rhetorical tool to be deployed, but itself comes into being in the relations between meanings, but also between people and utterances and, sometimes, sometimes between intentions and interpretations" (p. 13). Hutcheon characterizes this as irony's "edge" and, while not specifically defined as political, implies that a critical judgment is rhetorically articulated in an ironic text and that this judgment cannot be understood as detached. This conception of irony, drawing upon Burkean rhetorical theory that also influences the study of humor, is almost entirely absent in studies of political humor despite its potential to foster a fuller understanding of why so much political humor is characterized as ironic.

Finally, Burke's conception of irony invests in a dialectic tension that is important to scholars invested in characterizing rhetorical genres of humor. As noted in the section on political communication scholars have either called for such characterizations (Perks, 2008, Kuipers, 2011) or attempted to offer ones of their own

(Jones, 2005; Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009). Scholars invested in understanding mass mediated humor as a specific genre should be similarly invested in Burke's use of irony. In fact I argue "genre" may not be the right term, unless it encompassed the notion that these texts must always be understood in relation to other texts "integrally affecting one another" (Burke, 1969a p. 512). Much like the double logics of immediacy and hypermediacy that form the basis of remediation, humorous mediated texts cannot be understood apart from the larger body of discourses in which they draw their humor. Given that Burke's conception of irony is focused on the negotiation of dialectic tensions, of which several were identified in the political communication and public sphere literature, such treatments are needed.

This literature review discussed relevant issues in political communication and public sphere theory with relation to humor, media, and democratic deliberation. I highlighted areas of overlap among them and indicated spaces where incorporating remediation as a rhetorically ironic structure would prove productive to understanding the current mass mediated environment. I then clarified my rhetorical perspective in relation to these literatures, offering a Burkean approach as a means to chart these relationships. In this dissertation I will argue that remediation, which rhetorically structures mediated discursive action, is itself ironic. This conception of irony works through engagement rather than detachment and carries implications for how rhetorical scholars, political communication scholars, and public sphere scholars alike understand public discourse in the contemporary media age. Furthermore I contend that texts of humor are uniquely suited to investigate such discursive features because of their own relationship to irony.

It is my hope that such investigations will yield productive vocabularies to further investigate rapidly changing media forms along with the role of humor as part of a robust public sphere. I conclude this proposal with an outline of the remaining chapters.

CHAPTER OUTLINES

In Chapter 2 I articulate a theoretical mechanism to mediate the relationship between humor and media. This will unfold in two parts. First, I formulate a theory of humor primarily based on the works of Kenneth Burke to account for the various terms, tropes, and orientations associated with humor. Given that irony functions as both a rhetorical trope and rhetorical strategy associated with humor I also incorporate noted works on irony, with a particular focus on the works of Linda Hutcheon (2004) and Wayne Booth (1974). Burke's focus on irony as a master trope structuring linguistic action provides a helpful way to not only distinguish among types of humor but also to illustrate moments of overlap between them. Given that this project is focused on identifying how these overlapping moments enable a greater understanding of shifts in media such an approach is warranted. Additionally, I outline Bolter and Grusin's (2000) theory of remediation, specifically focusing on how the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy operate in an ironic relationship. I argue this relationship carries theoretical implications for public sphere and media scholars interested in newer media forms. To do so I incorporate scholarship on publics and counterpublics, particularly Robert Glenn Howard's vernacular mode and Geoffrey Baym's neo-modern paradigm of television news. I argue that both works provide interesting points of symmetry to Bolter

and Grusin's theory of media that demand further exploration. Specifically, Howard's discursive/structural hybrid of participatory media draws upon similar notions of irony and Baym's neo-modern paradigm can be better understood in its relationship to other media paradigms. A more complete articulation of Burkean rhetorical theory with remediation will provide the theoretical basis informing the remaining chapters.

In Chapter 3 I outline a methodological perspective informing the analysis of several case studies. The goal of this chapter is to provide insight into how texts are selected for analysis as well as detail how theoretical commitments inform that analysis. The theoretical foundation of this dissertation rests on a dialectic understanding of irony and how that dialectic informs a rhetorical understanding of remediation. Additionally the texts examined in this dissertation operate in an increasingly fragmented rhetorical environment. In addressing this fragmentation I develop a perspective toward the "text" that is "heavily dependent on context" (Brummett, 2010, p. 91). This perspective draws upon ironic tensions inherent in critical approaches offered by Michael Leff (1992) and Michael Calvin McGee (1990). This perspective enables a greater understanding of how fragmented rhetorical texts operate against a wider discursive context in the contemporary rhetorical environment. With regards to remediation in each chapter I similarly illustrate the interplay of the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy, noting where the features of the specific medium contribute to an ironic meaning of the text.

In Chapter 4 I present the first case study aimed at revealing the rhetorical work of irony and remediation in the website *Literally Unbelievable.* Operating as a relatively stable ironic text, *Literally Unbelievable* displays screenshots where individuals have

posted articles from satirical news site *The Onion* to their Facebook pages without recognizing the source as satire. *The Onion* is widely regarded as one of the preeminent sources of satire in the U.S. and has begun to receive similar scholarly attention (Sheagley, O' Laughlin, & Lindberg, 2008; Waisanen, 2011; Warner, 2011). Yet despite insightful analysis of the content and role *The Onion* plays in a post 9/11 media environment, little attention is paid to the relationship between rhetorical features of satire and the publication's integration of technology into its approach, a noted development in its success and influence (Kessler, 2011). An analysis of *Literally Unbelievable* adds to this conversation. Consisting of more than 25,000 unique posts culled from Facebook the site serves as an excellent case study for several reasons. First, it provides an interesting opportunity to investigate the relationship between stable and unstable irony in constructing meaning in a text. Second, the text itself is constructed of multiple textual fragments taken from multiple media, with those fragments taking on new meanings as they are remediated from one medium into another. This textual construction provides an excellent opportunity to identify existing rhetorical features of remediation. Third, this site reveals the presence of several phenomena studied by political communications scholars regarding partisanship, misinformation, and selective exposure in online settings. The rhetorical analysis of this text illustrates how these phenomena work to highlight the paradox of information embedded in online discourse outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

In Chapter 5 I analyze a humorous text that has a more overt target and political focus. The Twitter account @BPGlobalPR functions as an ironic satire of multinational

corporation British Petroleum (BP). Specifically, the account was started as a response to BP's involvement in the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Functioning as an ironic satire of BP's efforts to control its mediated image this account provides an excellent opportunity to examine the role of irony and remediation in positing Twitter as a discursive form. Specifically I argue the account ironically poses as the "real" British Petroleum, operating as a satirical response to BP's own response toward the environmental disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. Furthermore this account illustrates how the hypermediated institutional features of Twitter were used for non-institutional purposes, highlighting the role remediation plays in structuring new media discourse. Additionally, the discourses satirized by @BPGlobalPR not only criticize the efforts made by BP to take responsibility for the spill they also reveal larger ideological anxieties over the notion of corporate personhood. The spill, and BP's response, took place only months after the 2010 Supreme Court decision in the case of *Citizen's United v. FEC*, where restrictions on campaign contributions by private corporations were significantly relaxed. I argue that the efforts made by @BPGlobalPR to satirize the response of BP must be understood in relation to this decision because it highlights a much larger context regarding how Twitter operates as a discursive form.

In Chapter 6 I illustrate the presence of irony and remediation in the articulation of Occupy Wall Street (OWS). Specifically, I focus on how the tropes "Occupy" and "99 Percent" were introduced and refashioned through a series of interrelated texts. This includes the initial call to "Occupy Wall Street" found in a blog post from Canadian anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters*. Since *Adbusters* has traditionally used strategies of

irony, parody, and satire for the purposes of "culture jamming" symbols of consumer capitalism I argue these strategies are similarly embedded in the discourses of OWS. Specifically, I argue the rhetorical work of OWS illustrates the presence of irony and remediation in conceiving a mutually dependent relationship between online and offline discursive action. This relationship is important for refashioning discursive possibilities of public deliberation. Additionally, since OWS was rhetorically expressed amid a vast online social network I illustrate how the tropes "Occupy" and "99 Percent" were refashioned through additional texts understood in relation to the protests. These texts illustrate how OWS discourses were remediated throughout social media platforms while also highlighting how individuals "played" with those discourses. As I argue in this chapter these playful elements worked in relation to other modes of public deliberation in online settings, constituting an addition to the embodied protests found throughout multiple cities.

In Chapter 7 I review the analyses to provide more complete answers to the research questions outlined in this proposal. I discuss the implications this project has for scholars of political communication, rhetoric, and media studies and discuss ways these findings might be of pedagogical benefit to envision more productive media practices. I also address potential limitations to this study and identify questions that may still remain.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I introduced the major questions, theoretical concerns, and research proposal for this dissertation. I identified relevant research in communication studies that

guide this investigation, highlighting areas where further investigation is warranted. Focusing on the role of remediation and irony in fostering a greater understanding of contemporary mass mediated public discourse I concluded this chapter with a brief outline for the following chapters that will comprise this study. Like communication, humor and technology are complex phenomena, understood through the interplay of multiple factors and processes. It is fitting that many of these issues stem from a cultural tragedy of 9/11's magnitude, prompting widespread changes in media, politics, and public deliberation. While I may think the Internet functions as a big joke, it is hardly a trivial one.

Chapter 2: Rhetorical Theories of Humor, Irony, Remediation

"Irony is no joking matter"—Friedrich Schlegel

When characterizing humor as a literary genre in the *Poetics* Aristotle wrote, "Laughter is a species of what is disgraceful" (1996, p. 9). In making this claim Aristotle continues, "because it was not taken seriously, little attention was paid to comedy at first" (9). The placement of comedy (or humor) in opposition to "serious" topics of study is an intriguing move. Laughter, in its proximity to the silly, has often been treated as less than worthy of serious scholarly study than other modes of discourse. And yet thousands of years after Aristotle's works on the subject were largely lost Sigmund Freud argued, "that jokes have not received nearly as much philosophical consideration as they deserve in view of the part they play in our mental life" (1960, p. 25). Those who are so brave as to stake their intellectual and scholarly fortunes on such "silliness" find there is much to be understood. Humor's persistence as a legitimate topic of study is due as much to its "seriousness" as its complexity for human thought and communication. What has proven more difficult is articulating this growing complexity among humor's function, aims, and interpretations. It is the goal of this chapter to provide one such articulation.

My theoretical approach to comedy, humor, and irony draws heavily on the works of Kenneth Burke. Burke is by no means the only scholar consulted, particularly when discussing irony, but he is by far the most prominent in this chapter. For rhetorical

scholars the works of Kenneth Burke have proven immensely useful in analyzing humorous texts. In particular the comic frame and perspective by incongruity have been added to many a rhetorical critic's toolbox when analyzing the technique and goals of humorous discourse. Burke has figured prominently in studies of the rhetorical features of humor (Carlson, 1988; Buerkle, Mayer & Olson, 2003; Hutcheon, 2004). The multiplicity of poetic categories outlined in *Attitudes Toward History* along with Burke's lengthy explanation of the strategy of perspective by incongruity to dismantle and reorder predominant ways of thinking in those orientations have created opportunities to understand the aims and functions of humor.

In this chapter I articulate the theoretical foundation of this dissertation. It unfolds in three parts. First I begin with a discussion of Burkean approaches to comedy, humor, and their relationship to his thoughts on irony. Though the focus of the dissertation largely involves the relationship between irony and the Internet, using comedy/humor as a starting point is necessary to charting the dual role of irony as rhetorical strategy and rhetorical structure. After highlighting the link between Burkean perspectives on humor and irony I then illustrate how irony further functions as a rhetorical strategy structuring discursive action. In making this connection I hope to similarly offer a theoretical bridge between humor and the discursive features of new media.

Second, after articulating how irony operates a dual role as both rhetorical strategy and rhetorical structure I illustrate how this structure informs an understanding of the process of remediation posed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000). I argue

that because this theory relies heavily on a Burkean concept of irony it provides an important connection between irony and discourses of new media. This section includes an outline of the theory of remediation, particularly the mutually dependent logics of immediacy and hypermediacy. Bolter and Grusin argue that these logics underscore individuals' experience of media and are uniquely suited to understanding contemporary technologically mediated communication. My focus in this section is to illustrate that these mutually dependent logics rely on an explicitly rhetorical structure—that of irony.

Third, I conclude the chapter by locating similar ironic rhetorical structures within existing scholarship on what has been termed "new" or "participatory" media. In communication studies these discussions have largely played out in the areas of public sphere and media communication scholarship. Given a major goal of this dissertation is to put various academic literatures in conversation with one another that have been quite underexplored this decision is more than one of convenience. Specifically I place remediation as an ironic rhetorical structure in the context of Robert Glenn Howard's conception of the "vernacular mode" of new media discourse and Geoffrey Baym's notion of the "neo-modern" paradigm of television news. Both of these theoretical conceptions draw upon public sphere and media communication scholarship in making their claims about contemporary mass mediated public discourse. Specifically, each scholar argues that a hybridity of contradictory functions inform how various rhetorical actions operates via the Internet. That is, goals that are incommensurable are not only simultaneously present; they are mutually integral to the process of creating meaning in new media formats. Incorporating irony and remediation into these discussions extends

this scholarship in fruitful ways while setting a strong foundation for the later chapters of this dissertation. Overall, I argue that discourses of humor and discourses of new media can be connected through a dual understanding of irony as a rhetorical trope.

BURKEAN PERSPECTIVES OF COMEDY AND HUMOR

"To 'accept the universe' or to 'protest against it'" Burke opens *Attitudes Toward History* (1984a, p. 3) offering this distinction as a basis for uncovering how rhetors choose to respond to their social situation. Burke argues the linguistic actions taken in order to respond to situations "require programs" and these "programs require vocabularies" (p. 4). These vocabularies function as a set of strategies an individual may employ in order to name a given situation and more importantly influence their response. These influences affect one's attitude toward a situation. Burke argues our choice of vocabularies "prepare us *for* some functions and *against* others" (p. 5). Beyond these initial attitudes Burke continues that when one names a situation they also determine certain outcomes to the exclusion of others. The power of language here for Burke is in setting what possibilities exist based on how one rhetorically organizes the situation. He writes, "names go further: they suggest *how* you shall be for or against. Call a man a villain, and you have the choice of either attacking or cringing. Call him mistaken, and you invite yourself to attempt setting him right" (p.5).

Burke often identified termed these programs *poetic categories*. In naming here this term suggests the rhetorical use of language holds influence over the selection of strategies. Burke organized these categories into frames of acceptance and rejection.

These frames determine what vocabularies, or clusters of terms, will influence a rhetor's attitude. Frames of acceptance refer to "the more or less organized systems of meaning by which a thinking man gauges the historical situation and adopts a role with relation to it" (p. 5). Related, "rejection' is but a by-product of 'acceptance'" (p. 21). The notion of *related* rather than *opposed* is an important early distinction for a Burkean approach to humor. For Burke any rejection "has as much in common with the 'frame of acceptance' that it rejects" (p. 21).

It is in these categories that I begin my discussion of comedy and humor from a Burkean perspective. Kenneth Burke's main discussion of comedy as a strategy stems from his focus on orientation. As previously mentioned these orientations arise from the need for humans to make decisions and to address proper courses of action toward a given situation. Because these decisions are based on an incomplete view of the world influenced by one's "trained incapacity" (Burke, 1984b, p. 7) a need to determine a set of vocabularies to make the best possible decision arises. Burke argues that this is where an orientation "(or general view of reality) takes form" (p. 3). Within these orientations one is able to select "a bundle of judgments as to how things were, how they are, and how they may be" (p. 14). For Burke, a major issue arises when one's orientation toward a situation demands an interpretation and course of action that is incompatible with another. This occurs whenever one's piety and adherence toward a given orientation necessitates the selection of strategies that produce a result that does not confirm that perspective. Knowing that there is a "*sense of what properly goes with what*" (p. 74) one

engages in a set of rationalizations to alleviate such cognitive dissonance.[4] These rationalizations are what Burke would call casuistry, whereby "one introduces new principles while theoretically remaining faithful to old principles" (1984a, p. 229).

At the same time since "language owes its very existence to casuistry," (Burke, 1984a, p. 230) Burke is interested in understanding the point at which a rationalization ends and a new orientation begins. Such breaks can be intentionally accomplished through a perspective by incongruity. This is Burke's primary "method for gauging situations by verbal 'atom cracking.' That is, a word belongs by custom to a certain category—and by rational planning you wrench it loose and metaphorically apply it to a different category" (p. 308). By "category" Burke can be understood as implying differences in *poetic categories*, which our attention will be turned shortly. For now it is worthwhile to mention that is in essence a methodological endeavor, an intentional rhetorical practice aimed at removing words from one context (or orientation) and placing them in another. Interestingly Burke characterizes this as a "methodology of the pun" that "carries the same kind of enterprise linking hitherto unlinked words by rational criteria instead of tonal criteria" (p. 309). Perspective by incongruity then is one, of many ways in which Burke finds a metaphorical counterpart in a concept related to humor.

Not content solely with a strategy of the pun Burke offers a listing of orientations, or poetic categories, that encompass a wide range of views. A perspective by incongruity

[4] The glance toward the theory of cognitive dissonance is intentional given the supplementary focus of this dissertation on issues of fact checking and echo chambers from literature in political communication.

is useful in determining how and where "a frame will be stretched until it breaks" (Burke, 1984a, p. 134). Charting the limitations in casuistic stretching allows for distinctions to be made among the various poetic categories. At the same time these distinctions lead to confusion over the terms used to describe and label each category. This is meaningful for this chapter because theoretical challenges in distinguishing among comedy, humor, and satire stem partially from Burke's identifying these terms as poetic categories unto themselves or related to a category in some fashion. This is especially troublesome when specifically considering comedy and humor. One benefit of Burke's idea of casuistry is it helps uncover the transition from one poetic category to the next, or from frames of acceptance to rejection. Beyond that the distinctions can become quite murky. For example comedy and humor are often regarded as synonymous yet for Burke they are actually placed in contrast. To clarify I next consider the ways in which Burke attempts to differentiate comedy from humor and how those relate to terms like satire and irony.

Returning to earlier attempts to discuss a Burkean approach to comedy, the reader is better equipped to begin unpacking the distinctions. The first such distinction, that between comedy and humor, is the most confusing. "Comedy," Burke writes, "is the most civilized form of art" (1984a, p. 39). It is clear throughout his discussion of poetic categories that the comic is his preferred frame. Burke's assertion that comedy operates under the assumption that "humane enlightenment can go no further than in picturing people not as *vicious*, but as *mistaken*" (p. 41) clearly privileges the comic orientation to the naming and confronting of situations. This is contrasted rather sharply with "humor." Seeking to make a clear distinction between the two, Burke writes,

> Humor is the opposite of the heroic. The heroic promotes acceptance by *magnification*, making the hero's character as great as the situation he confronts, and fortifying the non-heroic individual vicariously, by identification with the hero, but humor reverses the process (p. 43)

Humor here is placed in opposition to the heroic. The significance of this placement is that the heroic operates as a frame of acceptance much like comedy. In this sense it could be argued that humor then is the opposite of comedy as well. However this characterization of humor as the opposite of comedy is similarly inadequate. Burke continues,

> Humor takes up the slack between the momentousness of the situation and the feebleness of those in the situation by *dwarfing the situation*. It converts downwards, as the heroic converts upwards. Hence it does not make for so completely well rounded a frame of acceptance as comedy, since it tends to gauge the situation falsely (1984a, p. 43)

Here the conflation of comedy and humor is already apparent in Burke's thought. In one sense humor is considered the opposite of comedy while in another it is merely an incomplete form of comedy. It is unclear whether Burke considers humor a frame at all, even when characterizing humor in the second passage as not as "well rounded a frame of acceptance as comedy". Burke considers humor to be some sort of threat to the goals of comedy, Burke's preferred orientation, that is utilized by those more interested in shifting to frames of rejection than acceptance. In a rather vivid passage Burke explains perhaps

this is "why so many of our outstanding comedians (who are really humorists) have a fondness for antithetical lapses into orgies of the tearful" (p. 43).

I contend one way to better distinguish comedy and humor is to consider humor as a technique rather than an orientation. Freud takes up this perspective in discussing the technique of jokes. He defines a joke as a "judgment which produces a comic contrast" (1960, p. 6). Jokes are largely predicated on comparison between two or more positions involving an intentional "'condensation accompanied by slight modification', and it may be suspected that the slighter the modification the better will be the joke" (1960, p. 25). Condensation and modification as techniques of joke telling can be thought of as analogous to perspective by incongruity. As previously mentioned perspective by incongruity serves as an intentional strategy of applying terms from one orientation to another to determine how and where "a frame will be stretched until it breaks" (Burke, 1984a, p. 134). So while a benefit of casuistic stretching lies in the ability to chart these shifts in orientation by taking words associated with one orientation and metaphorically applying them to another orientation there is also a possibility of overlap among orientations. That is, condensation and modification of terms often work to create double meanings between categories or at the very least confuse one meaning with another. For Freud this is part of the fun of effective joke telling, highlighting that "a favourite definition of joking has long been the ability to find similarity between dissimilar things—that is, hidden similarities" (1960, p. 7).[5]

[5] A definite "methodology of the pun."

Returning to the idea of casuistry the idea of overlap among categories becomes more fruitful. For the purposes of clarification I offer the following distinction of humor in a Burkean framework of comedy. I argue that humor is the recognition of a possible shift from one category to another, from frames of acceptance to rejection. The "conversion downward" to which Burke speaks is the indication that a frame may have been stretched to its limit and about to rupture. In this regard humor would be regarded as having a decidedly more aggressive bent, a characteristic typical of the rejection frames of burlesque and satire. At the same time humor is written alongside comedy and is not given the status of its own frame despite being implied as such. It occupies a space in-between acceptance and rejection where the limitations of casuistry are apparent but not fully broken. I make this claim partially on the grounds that just as rejection "has as much in common with the 'frame of acceptance' that it rejects," a comic orientation can depict an "intervention of fools" in "dwarfing the situation" (1984a, pp. 41-43). Like humor, comedy also seems to be about dwarfing in that one who is mistaken would also likely have their pride knocked down a few pegs. Thus comedy can be considered a general orientation of rhetorical strategies while humor serves as one of those strategies.

Regarding perspective by incongruity and humor, in *Permanence and Change* Burke writes, "the notion of perspective by incongruity would suggest that one casts out devils by misnaming them. It is not the naming in itself that does the work, but the conversion downward implicit in such naming" (1984b, p. 133). If humor similarly functions as a conversion downward then this linkage would serve to anchor perspective by incongruity as a major feature of humor. Furthermore, this linkage has the ability to

implicitly identify obfuscations of motives. Take, for instance, Burke's example of the child frightened by the monster in the corner of the room. "One casts out demons" Burke says, "by a vocabulary of conversion, by an incongruous naming, by calling them the very thing in all the world they are not: old coats" (p. 133). In converting downward to "misname" the rack of coats, one is in fact conveying what they exactly are. That is, the humor of the example for the child derives from the notion that in "misnaming" the parent has altered the orientation to more accurately reflect what has been there all along. Remember that for Burke humor "tends to gauge the situation falsely" (1984a, p. 43). However what is apparent in this example is that an intentionally false naming of a situation is but an accurate naming of another situation. In other words humor serves as a bridging device between orientations.

Placing humor within discussions of casuistic stretching is important for this dissertation because as Burke notes, "humor is most explosive when, besides throwing a shoe among the wheels of our machinery of judgment, it not only leaves one favored judgment completely intact, but deliberately strengthens it" (1984b, p. 112). Consider Freud's previous assertion that "a joke is a judgment which produces a comic contrast" (1960, p. 6). Extending this idea of humor from a Burkean sense would not only provide a contrast it would provide a deliberate perspective (by incongruity) in which one position is preferred over another. This is why Burke argues "humor specializes in incongruities; but by its trick of 'conversion downwards,' by its stylistic ways of reassuring us in dwarfing the magnitude of obstacles or threats, it provides us relief in laughter" (1984a, p. 58). The pleasure associated with laughter is alluded to once again

by Freud, writing "a joke is a *playful* judgment" (1960, p. 7). It is important to note here that play need not be regarded in opposition to the serious. While humor may serve the purpose of playful judgment of ideas it also signals the ability to grasp multiple competing perspectives or discourses (Kuipers, 2011).

There is an inherent tension with how I have located humor in this liminal space between poetic categories. It is this dual positioning of humor within both frames of acceptance and rejection that informs my theoretical approach to this study. There is an intentional dialectic tension in which I set these terms, with humor serving as both a strategy and structural role. This is important for outlining the role of irony in structuring linguistic action. Before turning to a discussion of irony I provide a final clarification of humor and Burke's notion of the comic.

For Burke the relationship between frames amounts to a predictable sum: "We are simply suggesting that, when you lump the lot, discounting each poetic category according to its nature, they seem to add up nearest to comedy. Which might be a roundabout way of saying: whatever poetry may be, criticism had best be comic" (1984a, p. 107). What is clear in his work is that Burke clearly privileges the comic as the ideal poetic category, an ideal often set against other "incomplete" strategies like satire, burlesque, or grotesque. However this position may be more a product of his own attitude toward history than it is with anything inherent to a comic orientation. Discussing the underlying foundation of motives in *Permanence and Change* he writes, "we learn to single out certain relationships in accordance with the particular linguistic texture into which we are born, though we may privately manipulate this linguistic

texture to formulate still other relationships" (1984b, p. 36). In this sense Burke's preference for the comic frame is as much a product of the motives demanded by the situation, tied to the historical position in which he was writing, as any other argument made on behalf of such a category.

Attitudes toward history shift as discourses and contexts shift. In order to more productively engage Burke's work on orientations that structure linguistic action it is important to begin understanding how these shifts occur and more importantly how they are structured rhetorically. To borrow an example from television, a major technological and discursive development during Burke's lifetime, Burke's privileging of the comic would be akin to the situational comedy format, based around a mistaken communication in the hopes of rehabilitation through a comic corrective. These tidy morality plays have in many ways seemed to outlive their purpose as audiences have shifted preference for vocabularies and sensibilities that respond to humor located in different orientations. From an entertainment perspective audiences have gravitated more toward television comedies that parody other genres such as *The Office* or function more as satire as in the case of *The Daily Show* and *Colbert Report*. Apart from anecdotal evidence from popular television programs rhetorical scholars have documented moments where a "preferred" frame is no longer suitable for providing vocabularies to aid a rhetor. Cheree Carlson (1988) noted that a comic frame might cease to be effective given the historical circumstances. Specifically she noted ways in which female rhetors were unable to use comic correctives of highlighting mistaken communication in arguing for women's suffrage, opting instead to use a more burlesque or satiric frame. Recognizing how these

shifts in orientation work rhetorically is important especially if they are to be adapted to a mass mediated environment that may be different from Burke's own. At the same time it is also important to document areas of overlap and identify how different orientations continue to influence one another. Humor serves as a way to recognize these shifts. It is now important to consider how these tensions are negotiated. To do so I now turn to how irony plays a role in this process. This role remains grounded in Burkean rhetorical theory while noting instances where Burke's conception of irony may be extended from discussions of humor to give a fuller rhetorical understanding of discursive practices of new media. I argue irony functions at two mutually influential levels: as a rhetorical strategy related to humor and as a rhetorical structure related to discursive practice.

IRONY AS A RHETORICAL STRATEGY

In this section I survey several rhetorical conceptions of irony, including Socratic irony, Quintilian's definition of irony, along with considerations from Soren Kierkegaard and Wayne Booth. These conceptions help to clarify and augment essential elements of Burkean notions of irony, providing a basis to more effectively chart its dual role as both rhetorical strategy related to humor and rhetorical structure related to discursive practice. I begin with a discussion of irony as an important rhetorical strategy.

Irony has a long history in the rhetorical tradition. Wayne Booth (1974) defines irony historically as "saying one thing and meaning the opposite" (p. 34). Etymologically, irony is generally understood as stemming from in the Greek word *eironeia*, meaning "dissimulation, mockery, or an affectation of ignorance" (Kennedy—

in a footnote translating Aristotle, 1991, p. 129). The earliest references to irony originate from this definition. In the *Gorgias* Callicles asks Socrates: "Tell me Socrates, are we to take you as serious now, or joking? For if you are serious and what you say is really true, must not the life of us human beings have been turned upside down, and must we not be doing quite the opposite, it seems, of what we ought to do?" (Plato, 2001, p. 109). The idea of a purposeful contradiction or double meaning is key to a Socratic irony. Griswold (2002) clarifies, "Socratic irony occurs when the speaker purposely dissimulates his views while in the process of manifesting them either through words or deeds," adding that, "what makes Socratic irony in particular so complicated is that the statements in question are in different ways both false and true" (p. 89). The aura of mockery in initial conceptions of irony gives it a decidedly cynical connotation. Aristotle writes that audiences "become angry at those mocking them when they are being serious; for mockery is contemptuous" (1991, p. 129) wherein "mockery" is substituted for "irony". Socrates's false humility in his claims to ignorance is often viewed as arrogant despite his professed intention otherwise (Griswold, 2002). Similar conceptions of irony can be found in Cicero's definition as well, writing in *De Oratore* that irony is an "urbane dissimulation when you understand something other than what is said…but when you are mocking when the entire speech itself is serious" (1942/1976, 2.67.269-70).

However it is important to also consider context with respect to irony. In *Institutes of Oratory* Quintilian (1856/2006) offers that irony occurs when "what is expressed is quite contrary to what is meant" (8.6.54). At the same he reminds that "as with most tropes, it is requisite to consider what is said and of whom, because it is

doubtless allowable, as is observed elsewhere, to censure with pretended praise, and to praise under the appearance of censure" (8.6.56). Quintilian's definition of irony softens the negative connotation of mockery, instead arguing that irony creates different meanings depending on context and intention of the rhetor. Apart from considerations of context it must be stressed that the use of irony also assumes on some level a consideration of audience. In his own treatise on irony (with continual references to Socrates) Soren Kierkegaard writes, "the danger with this focus on exclusion…is that a misleading picture might be painted of the standards for membership in this inner circle" (1989, p. 151). Kierkegaard's point highlights that mockery, while certainly at times present, cannot be the entirety of irony's focus because in order to create (an ironic) meaning the rhetor must connect with the audience in some way, even if by indirect means (Lippitt, 2000). Instead Kierkegaard argues that while mockery or exclusion is often unavoidable with irony it is also necessary for its rhetorical function. This is because there is "a certain superiority deriving from its not wanting to be understood immediately, even though it wants to be understood, with the result that this figure [that is, the figure of speech of irony] looks down, as it were, on plain and simple talk that everyone can promptly understand" (248). This idea is explored in the context of new media in Chapters 4 and 5. As a rhetorical strategy, in order for irony to function at all it must, at least temporarily, exclude an audience from understanding its "true" meaning.

One final consideration of interpretation (and misinterpretation) of irony is in order. In *A Rhetoric of Irony* Wayne Booth begins with the assertion "every good reader must be, among other things, sensitive in detecting and reconstructing ironic meanings"

(1974, p. 1). The ability to detect and understand ironic statements, Booth argues, is a necessary skill of all audiences. However, Booth notes, "there is reason to believe that most of us think we are less vulnerable to mistakes with irony than we are" (1). Much like Quintilian's call to consider appropriateness and context with irony Booth argues that understanding irony is a complex mix of intent and interpretation. He notes two types of irony. Stable irony, Booth argues, involves statements intended to be read as ironic. He describes these stable ironies as

> Deliberately created by human beings to be heard or read and understood with some precision by other human beings…they are all *covert*, intended to be reconstructed with meanings different from those on the surface…they are all nevertheless *stable* or *fixed*, in the sense that once a reconstruction of meaning has been made, the reader is not then invited to undermine it with further demolitions and reconstructions…they are all *finite* in application (5-6).

The benefits of such description are that it allows the creation of a subject that "can be studied and not just speculated or preached about" (7). Additionally, this description assumes on some level that the audience largely has a stable reading commensurate with the intention of the rhetor. That is, the interaction between speaker and audience is a predictable one and can be understood as concrete rhetorical artifacts to be analyzed. One possible example of both speaker and audience "getting the irony" of the text is the one mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 1. The comments left on the Google Maps location of the bin Laden compound suggest on some level that those participating by

posting comments overwhelmingly similar to ones previously left on the site were in on the same joke.

Conversely, unstable irony exists where a rhetor "refuses to declare himself, however subtly, *for* any stable proposition, even the opposite of whatever proposition his irony vigorously denies" (Booth, 1974, p. 240). Booth argues that unstable irony contrasts with its stable counterpart in that authorship and intent are difficult to decipher at best and remain forever hidden at worst. Given this instability the audience may also decode the "true" meaning of utterance in a similarly unpredictable manner. This instability may also be hard to predict. For example consider the range of reactions often encountered when an article from *The Onion* is posted to a social media site like Facebook. There are numerous examples of individuals commenting on articles from this satirical news site that appear unaware of the intention of stable irony (Hongo, 2013). Furthermore, with unstable ironies there is no clear "end" to the act of interpretation, continuing ad infinitum as long as the "negation that begins all ironic play" (240) is present.

However, much like Kenneth Burke's discussion of poetic categories Booth notes an overlap between stable and unstable ironies. Since the categorization of irony as either stable or unstable depends on the ability of the reader to recognize the intent of the rhetor Booth argues that understanding the "meaning" of an ironic statement "will depend on our decision, conscious or unconscious, about whether we are asked by it to push through its confusions to some final point of clarity or to see through it to a possibly infinite series of further confusions" (1971, p. 241). Despite a rhetor's best intentions

and carefully crafted wording a work of stable, that is intentional, audiences often misread irony. Drawing upon Kenneth Burke's thoughts on an individual's ability to recognize "innate forms of the mind" (1984a, p. 46) Booth identifies a series of "Crippling Handicaps" influencing an audiences' interpretation of ironic statements. They are *ignorance*, *inability to pay attention*, *prejudice*, *lack of practice*, and *emotional inadequacy*. I will briefly explain each handicap.

First, by ignorance Booth is not referring to a lack of intelligence in a reader. Rather he points out there will always be aspects of the human experience in which a person will not be familiar, that ignorance to some degree is common in everyone. He writes, "nobody can work on removing ignorance in all directions at once; and therefore no particular exhortation or art can emerge from this greatest and most troubling of deficiencies" (1971, p. 222). For Booth the most troubling aspect of ignorance is not a lack of knowledge but overconfidence in one's knowledge. He continues, "most of the 'incredible' misreadings I know of have occurred when intelligent readers have ventured with too much confidence onto familiar grounds" (222). Booth refers to an inability to recognize an ironic text as such as partially attributed to the reader's unacknowledged lack of understanding on a given topic.[6] It is important to note here that Booth's explanation of ignorance as overconfidence in one's knowledge is akin to Kenneth Burke's notion of "trained incapacity" whereby an individual is limited in their ability to view the world outside of their own learned perspective. Similarly I argue that the harm

[6] This handicap manifests quite significantly in discussions of partisanship and political humor, further illustrated in Chapter 4

in such ignorance does not stem so much from a lack of knowledge on a subject as it does a reader's unwillingness to seek out new information.

Second, Booth identifies an inability to pay attention as another contributing factor to misreading irony. This handicap is not hard to fathom when considering irony and the fractured online media environment alluded to in Chapter 1. Again Booth characterizes this phenomenon as somewhat innate, "lack of full attention to the words that sweep over us daily may not matter very much; indeed a certain amount of inattentiveness may be necessary to survive them" (1971, p. 223). At the same time this "inattentiveness," while necessary to remain focused on the most important tasks, can also lead to misreading irony. "No one can be perpetually alert," Booth continues, "yet perpetual alertness is in a sense what is required" (224), making an ironist's desired interpretation in the reader challenging.

Third, the prejudice of the reader influences their ability to read (or misread) irony. Booth writes, "Since every reader carries a great load of prejudgments, since in fact he could not read anything without relying on them, one cannot exhort oneself simply to read with an 'open mind'" (1974, p. 225). No matter how overtly constructed interpretations of ironic statements are influenced by ideological positions of the audience.

Fourth, a lack of practice breeds an inability to interpret a text as ironic, leaving the reader to possibly miss the intended meaning entirely. Booth suggests here that understanding irony is on some level a learned skill. He writes, "Everything that I said about the grooves of genre suggests that those who cannot recognize the grooves,

however attentive, unprejudiced, or wise they are, will misread ironies" (1971, p. 226). As Linda Hutcheon (2004) observes there is a constant push to define any given era as *the* age of irony. Booth is no different, arguing, "in an age with so much irony as ours, everyone would have removed at least this one handicap" (227). Much like the handicap of the inability to pay attention, "someone who sees ironies everywhere is almost as disqualified as someone who has had little or no experience. The quality of the experience is what counts" (227).

The final handicap is emotional inadequacy. Booth admits this handicap "will no doubt seem to some readers as offensively elitist" (1974, p.227). Given earlier definitions of irony as a rhetorical strategy of mockery he is not entirely wrong. But Booth continues this inadequacy concerns the role of pathos in interpreting irony rather than a perceived lack of emotional ability. He argues with irony, "some readers disqualify themselves by being either too ready to emote or too resistant to emotional appeals," and that unfortunately "there is simply nothing one can do about this kind of inadequacy that is any simpler than amending one's whole life" (227). Instead Booth identifies this inadequacy "only as something for other people to take into account" when working through the meaning of an ironic text. What is important to take away here is that interpretation of irony is significantly influenced by these factors, factors that the ironist only has some degree of agency to control.

Thus far my survey of irony has emphasized its use as a rhetorical strategy. Certainly throughout this dissertation such strategies will be identified in the textual

analyses of case studies.[7] However another distinction must be made. Booth does an admirable job in illustrating the (re)construction of ironic meanings as an interplay between rhetor and audience. That is ironic meaning relies heavily on a rhetorical negotiation between rhetor and audience. This negotiating function has also served to locate irony as rhetorical structure *in addition to* rhetorical strategy. In the spirit of highlighting double meanings I now shift from irony as a rhetorical strategy related to humor and irony as a rhetorical trope concerned primarily with providing a structure to understand contradictory or double meanings. This discussion also establishes the foundation to sketch irony's relevance to the rhetorical process of remediation as well as research in political and media communication.

IRONY AS RHETORICAL STRUCTURE

In this section I shift from an emphasis on irony as a rhetorical strategy, or figure of speech, to irony as rhetorical trope or structure. This section draws largely upon Kenneth Burke's discussion of irony as a 'Master Trope' and concludes with a discussion of how Burke's conception of irony informs Linda Hutcheon's (2004) argument on irony as infused with a political "edge". These illustrations are necessary to understand how irony operates as the predominant rhetorical structure of new media discourse.

In his essay "Four Master Tropes" Kenneth Burke invokes the usage of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony "not with their purely figurative usage, but with their role in the discovery and description of 'the truth'" (1969a, p. 503). Similar to Burkean

[7] The role irony plays in revealing mutually dependent discursive meanings in a text, as well as how those very texts are constructed, is explained further in Chapter 3.

conceptions of comedy and humor these terms are theorized not as rhetorical strategies but as heuristic ones, aimed at uncovering and illuminating motives. Burke explains that, much like the transition between poetic categories, there is an overlap among the tropes. For example metaphor, which Burke substitutes *perspective*, "the seeing of something in terms of something else involves the 'carrying-over' of a term from one realm into another, a process that necessarily involves varying degrees of incongruity in that the two realms are never identical" (504). Similar threads can be noted between seeing something in terms of something else and a perspective by incongruity in which humor is located.

While metonymy and metaphor overlap quite a bit, with a *perspective* also functioning in some ways as a *reduction*, along with metonymy and synecdoche doing the same, with a *reduction* often serving as a *representation*, these differences are in starker contrast to irony's focus on *dialectic*. Burke hints at this distinction, "in a broader sense, all the transformations considered in this essay are dialectical" (1969a, p. 503). Burke doesn't seem to explain if and how irony carries over into other tropes. Rather he focuses on irony's structural role in characterizing an "agent's situation or strategy" (511). In organizing and selecting a response to a situation irony, "involves properties both intrinsic to the agent and developed with relation to the scene and other agents" (511). It is important to note this relational component of irony relies on the mutual dependence of terms, even if those terms, or situations, are contradictory. Burke continues, "the dialectic of this participation produces…a 'resultant certainty' of a different quality, necessarily ironic, since it requires that all the sub-certainties be

considered as neither true nor false, but *contributory*" (513). Rhetorical scholar Dave Tell takes up this relational aspect of Burke's argument, adding that what these "perspective of perspectives" contribute is "holding conflicting perspectives in productive tension" (2004, p. 47). Irony's heuristic value, then, is in highlighting how tensions between conflicting perspectives aid "in the discovery and description of 'the truth'" (Burke, 1969a, p. 503). It is an epistemological exercise "possible only by way of rhetorical inducement" (Tell, 2004, p. 34).

A major epistemological contribution of irony as rhetorical trope involves the ability to manage incommensurable ways of knowing. If irony as rhetorical figure works largely via the creation of double meanings within a text then irony as rhetorical trope operates largely via the negotiation of double epistemologies among larger bodies of discourse. Tell argues this is a key development in Burke's theorizing of irony. Contextualizing "Four Master Tropes" against Kenneth Burke's sustained correspondence with literary editor John Crowe Ransom, Tell notes irony allows for the negotiation between two "incommensurable epistemologies: 'scientific knowledge' and 'poetic knowledge'" (2004, p. 34). Whereas Ransom repeatedly worked to distinguish the two ways of knowing Burke refused to make such distinctions. By positing irony as a dialectic where "all the sub-certainties," which in this case can mean categories of knowledge, "be considered as neither true nor false, but *contributory*" (Burke, 1969, p. 512) contradictory epistemological positions function as mutually influential. For Burke, since both scientific and poetic knowledge are constituted through language they not only coexist, each must be understood in relation to the other.

This last part on contribution is key to my overall theoretical grounding of this dissertation. Reverting back to earlier discussions of poetic categories I argued that humor functioned as the recognition of a casuistic break from one orientation to another. Remembering that there is some degree of overlap between orientations irony is the structural hinge on which humor is located across poetic categories. Such a formulation could for example give greater rhetorical insight into how and when rhetoric shifts from a comedic to a satiric orientation, as in Carlson's (1988) previously mentioned examination of shifts in orientation of 19th century suffragist orators. As she noted, changes (or lack thereof) in political and social circumstances were met with shifts in orientation from comedy to satire to burlesque by the speakers. Irony functions to help negotiate the mutually dependent relationships of these orientations, with humor and wit still remaining present within the speeches themselves. Given that perspective by incongruity finds a counterpart in the idea of a "'carrying-over' of a term from one realm into another" (Burke, 1969a, p. 504) the terms are embedded in one another from the beginning depending on one's orientation. But it is irony that has the dual functioning of both a rhetorical strategy of the creation of double meanings in language and a rhetorical trope negotiating the relationship between contradictory orientations.

These relationships are not neutral. Burke writes,

> Irony arises when one tries, by interaction of terms upon one another, to produce a *development* which uses all the terms. Hence, from a standpoint of this total form (this 'perspective of perspectives'), none of the participating 'sub-perspectives can be treated as precisely right or

> precisely wrong. They are all voices, or personalities, or positions, integrally affecting one another (1969a, p. 512)

This is precisely the moment where Linda Hutcheon argues irony produces meaning. Alluding to idea that tropes are invested in "the discovery and description of 'the truth'" (Burke, 1969a, p. 503) Hutcheon argues irony is "inclusive and relational: the said and the unsaid coexist for the interpreter, and each has meaning in relation to the other because they literally 'interact' to create the 'real' ironic meaning" (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 11). The relational component is also what gives irony its purported "edge". Hutcheon continues, "irony happens as part of a communicative process; it is not a static rhetorical tool to be deployed, but itself comes into being in the relation between meanings, but also between people and utterances and, sometimes, sometimes between intentions and interpretations" (13). The interplay among meanings, relationships, intentions, and interpretations is always done with a purpose, whether implicit or explicit. For Hutcheon, this motivation is explicitly Burkean in that "the interpreter as agent performs an act—attributes both meanings and motives—and does so in a particular situation and context, for a particular purpose, and with particular means" (11). Evaluation is thus part and parcel of the whole process. Here one is reminded of the previously mentioned Freudian (1960) definition of jokes as playful judgments that produce comic contrasts.

This evaluative component of irony is also what makes it such a close cousin to another term associated with humor, that of satire. Many of the texts examined in this dissertation and referenced in the first chapter are often characterized as satire. As mentioned in Chapter 1 satire is often deployed for the purposes of social commentary or

criticism. Burke characterized satire as a poetic category of rejection "for the satirist attacks *in others* the weaknesses and temptations that are really *within himself*" (1984a, p. 49). While humor is often recognized in a satiric text, judgment is its defining feature. Gray, Jones, & Thompson argue satire is humor's "most overtly political genre" (2009, p. 11). Since directing the audience toward a specific judgment occupies much of the intent of the satirist (Test, 1991) exclusion of certain "targets" is once again present. However, Booth counters that such in-group/ out-group dynamics are mutually dependent on one another. Explicitly linking irony to satire in this manner Booth argues, "even irony that does imply victims, as in all ironic satire, is much more clearly directed to more affirmative matters. And every irony inevitably builds a community of believers even as it excludes" (1971, p. 28). Again the reader might be reminded of the negotiating of mutually dependent yet contradictory positions. Irony as a rhetorical structure is what enables such positions to coexist and overlap.

Finally, the evaluative component also provides an opportunity to navigate the difficult terrain of intent. Complications and misdirections of intent often lead to the sort of juxtaposition needed to make a joke "work". Equally complicated is the problem of unintended coding of language leading one to attribute humor (or irony) where none was intended and vice versa. Hutcheon accounts for both. Irony is an intentional "making of **meaning** in addition to and different from what is stated, together with an **attitude** toward both the said and the unsaid" (2004, p. 11).[8] If understanding comedy and satire as orientations Hutcheon's argument regarding meaning and attitude sheds light on why

[8] Emphasis in original.

someone may not "get" an instance of humor. "In fact," Hutcheon argues, "'get' may be an inaccurate and even inappropriate verb: **'make'** would be much more precise" (64).[9]

To summarize my argument to this point: Irony is the rhetorical structure underlying the existence of double meanings in overlapping orientations that signal a possible casuistic break in orientation, with humor serving as the external recognition of the discourse that signals these shifts. Irony structures dialectic tensions between orientations in order to envision the possibility of new perspectives and discourses. The presence and strategic use of humor serves as an indication that a frame has stretched to the point of rupture. The laughter that often (but by no means must) ensues indicates the areas of overlap between orientations. The heuristic potential here is especially salient when orientations appear incommensurable, as in the case of frames of acceptance or rejection. In such cases laughter makes one think.

Conceiving of irony and humor in this way holds is beneficial for scholars who study what has been termed "new media". Burke himself may have foreshadowed the possibilities for his work to be refashioned for the Internet age. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, rather than seeing the audience as a given in the Aristotelian sense Burke addressed, "the extreme heterogeneity of modern life, however, combined with the nature of modern postal agencies, brings up another kind of possibility: the systematic attempt to *carve out* an audience" (1969b, p. 64). The articulation of audiences based on the interplay of meaning and intent in an ironic structure could be of immense benefit to scholars of new media. Specifically, the concept of remediation, focused on providing a theoretical

[9] Emphasis mine.

understanding of the "new" in "new media" can be understood as operating as an ironic rhetorical structure. In order to better clarify how irony plays a role in structuring discursive action online I turn next to outlining Bolter and Grusin's theory of remediation.

REMEDIATION AS IRONIC RHETORICAL STRUCTURE

Considerable space was spent in the previous sections outlining the function of irony as a rhetorical structure. In so doing I argued that irony functions as both a figure and a trope, with such interplay extending into a larger understanding of how irony can structure the negotiation of mutually dependent yet contradictory positions. This structure carries heuristic and epistemological potential. In this section I make this connection more explicit to discourses of new media. In their landmark work *Remediation: Understanding New Media* Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000) posit remediation as the central organizing feature of "new" media discourses. Remediation operates through the interplay of twin logics. The first, the logic of immediacy, involves "a style of visual representation whose goal is to make the viewer forget the presence of the medium (canvas, photographic film, cinema, and so on) and believe that he is in the presence of the objects representation" (272-273). Immediacy is a logic of erasure, describing the process by which communication technologies attempt to make the user forget that they are experiencing a text via a medium. A photograph is a prime example, as are perspective paintings and three-dimensional computer graphics. In each instance the medium works by providing a visual representation as if the viewer

were in the presence of the object in the frame. The drive to use technological advances to bridge gaps of time and space between individuals is a key focus of media. Immediacy then works through the (impossible) goal of erasing the very technology providing the experience. The point is to immerse the user in a visual, textual, or sensory experience so that they "forget" those same experiences are being mediated.

The second logic is hypermediacy, defined as "a style of visual representation whose goal is to remind the viewer of the medium" (272). As the counterpart to immediacy hypermediacy operates through a fascination with the very media creating the experience. Bolter and Grusin write, "in digital media today, the practice of hypermediacy is most evident in the heterogeneous 'windowed style' of World Wide Web pages, the desktop interface, multimedia programs, and video games" (31). This definition suggests hypermediacy as a relatively newer logic, emerging in the age of television, personal computers, and the Internet. However, Bolter and Grusin argue "the same logic is at work in the frenetic graphic design of cyberculture magazines like *Wired* and *Mondo 2000*, in the patchwork layout of such mainstream print publications as *USA Today*, and even in the earlier 'multimediated' spaces of Dutch painting, medieval cathedrals, and illuminated manuscripts" (31). Bolter and Grusin offer these last examples to establish remediation as a process not tied to any specific technological moment. They write, "we can identify the same process throughout the last several hundred years of Western visual representation" (11) providing numerous examples in addition to the ones previously mentioned. Additionally, similar processes have been identified with regards to artistic practices apart from visual representation. For example

in his account of Renaissance court life, Baldesar Castiglione introduces the concept of *sprezzatura* to describe an artistic "[nonchalance], so as to conceal all art and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort" (Castiglione, 2002, p. 32). Characterized as a "technology of behavioral performance" and an "art that hides art" (Berger, 2002, p. 295) sprezzatura denotes a tension between graceful artistic expression and the concealing of the efforts to create such graceful artistic expression that appears quite similar to the tensions between immediacy and hypermediacy.[10] At the same time the rapid development of newer communication technologies, especially the Internet, in the latter half of the twentieth century creates a unique opportunity to document the presence of remediation in mass mediated public discourse. Bolter and Grusin write, "in this last decade of the twentieth century, we are in an unusual position to appreciate remediation, because of the rapid development of new digital media and the nearly as rapid response by traditional media. Older electronic and print media are seeking to reaffirm their status within our cultures as digital media challenge their status" (2000, p. 5).

A key feature of Bolter and Grusin's theory, and central to the overall theoretical grounding of this dissertation, is that immediacy and hypermediacy coexist despite their contradictory goals. Specifically hypermediacy can be understood as the fascination with the process of mediation that "makes us aware of the medium or media and (in sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways) reminds us of our desire for immediacy"

[10] For a more comprehensive discussion of this tension, see Berger (2002). Berger notes sprezzatura relies on "a form of defensive irony: the ability to disguise what one really desires, feels, thinks, and means or intends" (297). Additionally, Berger traces the definition of sprezzatura to the Italian verb *sprezzare* meaning "(to scorn, despise, disdain)" (296), creating a further etymological connection with irony.

(34). I argue these dual logics operate with an ironic rhetorical structure. I make this claim in three parts: Remediation employs an incommensurable double logic, these logics are mutually dependent, and these relationships are rhetorical in nature.

First, remediation rests on an incommensurable double logic. Immediacy relies on a desire for erasure, wherein the technological "advancement" involves getting the user to deny the very act of mediation. Viewing a photograph, watching a live television broadcast, or having a conversation via web video are all attempts to place audiences in synchronous time and space. The "trick" of mediation lies in convincing the user that no mediation is in fact taking place. This is not to say that individuals actually believe they are experiencing "the transparent presentation of the real" (Bolter and Grusin, 2000, p. 21). Instead the focus is on approaching the unobtainable goal of creating a "medium whose purpose is to disappear" (21). However this process of erasure is "made difficult by the apparatus" needed to mimic the transparent experience. Mediation always involves a fascination to some extent with the technology working to create an experience that denies its own existence, the logic of hypermediacy. This is an entirely oppositional logic from that of immediacy. Bolter and Grusin invoke the example of linear perspective in painting to illustrate this contradiction: "If executed properly, the surface of the painting dissolved and presented to the viewer the scene beyond," while at the same time "the irony is that was hard work to make the surface disappear in this fashion, and in fact the artist's success at effacing his process, and thereby himself, became for trained viewers a mark of his skill and therefore his presence" (25). In positing competing logics that are irreconcilable yet simultaneously present in the

structuring the process of mediation, I argue remediation operates according to the previously articulated rhetorical structure of irony.

Second, the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy in remediation are mutually dependent. Bolter and Grusin continue, "Our two seemingly contradictory logics not only coexist in digital media but are mutually dependent" (2000, p. 6). The previously mentioned example of linear perspective painting again helps clarify this mutual dependency. The beauty of the painting in representing a lifelike image (immediacy) is a testament to the skill of the painter to create such a representation (hypermediacy). In this sense "Immediacy depends on hypermediacy" (6). Both must be understood in relation to one another because they are integral to recognizing the existence of one another.

Additionally, these mutually dependent logics apply to the relationship between newer and older forms of media. Bolter and Grusin explain "both new and old media are invoking the twin logics of immediacy and hypermediacy in their efforts to remake themselves and each other" (1999, p. 5). What this means is that the affordances of any new medium must be understood in relation to how it is different from what came before. This too works according to the contradictory but mutually dependent logics of immediacy and hypermediacy. If all media attempt to disappear but fall short (immediacy) then newer advancements would do so better than older ones, thereby invoking a fascination with a technology that could improve upon such a task (hypermediacy). Bolter and Grusin argue this is precisely how *re-mediation* occurs, the "representation of one medium in another" (45). Older media are reinterpreted in the

context of newer media, offering new possibilities and understandings of each. On one hand newer media are offered simply as "a new means of gaining access of older materials, as if the content of the older media could simply be poured into the new one" (45). On the other hand, "the very act of remediation, however, ensures that the older medium cannot be entirely effaced; the new medium remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged and unacknowledged ways" (47). Invoking the twin logics of immediacy and hypermediacy in order to remake themselves and each other remediation operates in a dialectic (ironic) pairing where "all voices, or personalities, or positions, integrally affecting one another" and "by the interaction of terms upon one another, to produce a development that uses all the terms" (Burke, 1969a, p. 512). Remediation is thus linked to irony in that both terms describe the interaction of multiple contradictory discourses as "neither true nor false, but *contributory*" (513). Since remediation is invested in "holding conflicting perspectives in productive tension" (2004, p. 47) it operates as an ironic structure.

Finally, remediation is primarily a rhetorical phenomenon. Bolter and Grusin write, "we do not claim that immediacy, hypermediacy, and remediation are universal aesthetic truths; rather, we regard them as practices of specific groups in specific times" (2000, p. 21). Since Bolter and Grusin focus on how remediation influences how media are *used*, along with how those uses are influenced by the historical context in which those media exist, I argue this is a rhetorical concern. Remediation, operating through mutually dependent yet contradictory logics of immediacy and hypermediacy, is predicated on understanding the relationship between newer and older media. In so doing

Bolter and Grusin offer a way to construct and contest the meaning of "new" that must be understood in relation to "old". This struggle over meaning, along with negotiating the tensions between the contradictory logics is constituted rhetorically and a product of a specific historical moment. "To say that digital media 'challenge' earlier media," Bolter and Grusin argue, "is the rhetoric of technological determinism only if technology is considered in isolation. In all cases we mean to say that the agency for cultural change is located in the interaction of formal, material, and economic logics that slip into out of the grasp of individuals and social groups" (p. 78). The tensions between immediacy/hypermediacy and new/old media therefore must be understood as rhetorical negotiations.

REMEDIATION EXAMPLES IN CURRENT COMMUNICATION LITERATURE

Thus far this chapter has focused on illustrating how irony works to rhetorically structure mutually dependent but contradictory positions, articulating how such a structure applies to the overlap of Burkean poetic categories and more importantly Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation. In doing so I argued that comedy and humor share a similar ironic rhetorical structure to that of remediation. What remains to be discussed is how this structure informs discourses of new media. In this last section I offer three such possibilities. First, remediation as an ironic rhetorical structure informs some long-standing critiques of the Habermasian public sphere. Second, remediation as an ironic structure informs Robert Glenn Howard's hybridity theory of the "vernacular mode" in participatory media. Finally, Geoffrey Baym's "neo-modern" paradigm of television

news can be understood as operating with the same ironic rhetorical structure. These examples are by no means exhaustive and are instead offered as ways to begin bridging the theoretical synthesis articulated in this chapter to contemporary scholarship invested in analyzing texts of mass mediated political humor.

First, remediation as an ironic rhetorical structure sheds light on several important critiques of the public sphere as initially theorized by Jurgen Habermas (1989). Two critiques in particular are warranted here. The first regards Nicholas Garnham's (1992) call for a better account of mediated forms of communication in public discourse and deliberation. The second is Sheller and Urry's (2003) discussion of the increased mobility of communication technologies and their influence on the continued blurring of public and private.

In his essay "The Media and the Public Sphere" Nicholas Garnham argues too little attention has been paid to changes in mediated forms of communication. Specifically, he argues, "our inherited structures of public communication, those institutions within which we construct, distribute, and consume symbolic forms, are themselves undergoing a profound change" (1992, p. 362). Understanding and analyzing these profound changes can be accomplished through an application of remediation. Furthermore two of Garnham's critiques of Habermas specifically invoke the ironic rhetorical structure articulated in this chapter. Garnham notes a shortcoming of Habermas's theory "leads him to neglect the continuing need for compromise between bitterly divisive and irreconcilable political positions" and that he similarly "neglects both the rhetorical and playful aspects of communicative action, which leads to too sharp

a distinction between information and entertainment" (360). In a previous section I explained how Kenneth Burke positioned irony to rhetorically structure the tension between scientific and poetic realism, with each working in relation to one another. A similar relationship should be asserted to better negotiate the distinctions Garnham identifies.

Additionally a similar ironic tension could be identified in the distinction between notions of "public" and "private" in Habermas. Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2003) argue the automobile and more recently the smartphone have created a hybrid of public/private mobility. Though not specifically talking about social networking sites, the ways individuals use these sites to communicate with and across a variety of social groups certainly relates back to this idea of hybridity. Sheller and Urry note an important link between the actions of private individuals blurring into larger contexts through the use of technologically mediated communication. They assert a "macro-structural trend" in the blurring of global markets and communication networks that are "also tied into these everyday forms of dwelling in mobility and screen-mediated communications" (2003, p. 108). I argue such hybridity on a structural level, along with its ties to everyday communicative practices rests on an ironic understanding of remediation. This hybridity is revisited in Chapter 6.

Second, building upon this notion of hybridity the dual nature of ironic meaning and the logics of immediacy/hypermediacy provide important extensions of Robert Glenn Howard's notion of the "vernacular mode" in understanding participatory media. In his analysis of the discursive features of blogs Howard posits a "vernacular mode" to

document the rhetorical expectations of new media technologies. Using the term "participatory media" Howard notes, "the social factors that have operated to form communication technologies result in institutional intentions becoming embedded in online vernacular discourse" (2010, p. 246). As previously noted by Bolter and Grusin, communication technologies always already have a set of ideological underpinnings stemming from the institutions and economic structures in which they were developed. Understanding, negotiating, and operating within these structures is a matter of rhetoric. Like Bolter and Grusin, Howard's answer to this is a discursive/structural hybrid identified as a "vernacular mode" that aims to negotiate the blurring of institutional and non-institutional discourses in new media technologies. Like immediacy and hypermediacy, these discourses are contradictory yet mutually dependent and held in an ironic pairing. This pairing is revisited in Chapter 5.

Finally, studies in political communication focusing on the analysis of mass mediated texts of political humor theorize a media environment that operates according to the ironic logics of remediation. Specifically, political humor and media scholar Geoffrey Baym (2009) has charted how television shows such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* have become "discursively integrated" into larger contexts of mass mediated public discourse. Baym argues the current media age should be understood an emergent "neo-modern paradigm" of news, characterized again as a hybrid between network/cable news discourses and online digital media discourses that offer "more than a simple narrative about the breakdown of the 'real' news or the rise of infotainment" (2009, p. 20). Aside from the implicit reference to Garnham's critique of the untenable

distinction between information and entertainment, it is important to note that the political satire of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert are the primary exemplars Baym uses to illustrate this neo-modern paradigm. At the same time I argue this paradigm can be explicitly understood as the remediation of cable news in the context of online digital media. Bolter and Grusin somewhat foreshadow this development in their discussion of the remediation of television news. They note cable news in particular combines a traditional televised shot of a newscaster "with a series of graphics and explanatory captions, until the broadcast begins to resemble a web site or multimedia application," adding that, "the borders of these windows can mark abrupt transitions from one logic to another" (2000, p. 189). Just as immediacy depends on hypermediacy, Baym's neo-modern paradigm of news remediates cable news with online news so that each is mutually dependent on the other. The implications of this resemblance, and the transitions between immediacy and hypermediacy are explored in Chapter 4.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I articulated the theoretical foundation informing this dissertation. I began with a discussion of comedy and humor grounded largely in the works of Kenneth Burke, noting that Burke locates these terms within larger discussions of poetic categories and orientations. After highlighting how humor and comedy function in relation to orientation I next surveyed relevant works on irony, paying special attention to note distinctions between irony as a rhetorical strategy and irony as a rhetorical structure. This dual positioning of irony informs the structuring of mutually dependent yet

contradictory positions. In addition to helping negotiate tensions between overlapping poetic categories I argued this same rhetorical structure could be used to identify the process of remediation as a predominantly rhetorical practice. After asserting remediation as an ironic rhetorical structure I concluded the chapter by outlining several examples of how such structures are already implicit in contemporary communication literature on mass mediated political discourse. It is my hope that the theoretical links between humor, satire, irony, and new media discourses have become clear. In the next chapter I outline how such theoretical foundations can be employed methodologically for the purposes of rhetorical criticism.

Chapter 3: Methodological Approaches to Irony and Remediation

In this chapter I outline the methodological perspectives informing the analysis of the case study chapters. Articulating a coherent methodology apart from theory remains a challenge among rhetorical scholars. In *Techniques of Close Reading* Brummett (2010) writes, "A theory and its method is a structure of thinking, of perception, shared by both critic and reader as they approach a text" (p. 35). The goal of the critic should be to guide the reader through a specific interpretation of the texts to be examined that is informed by their theoretical foundation. Since my theoretical foundation focused largely on how Burkean irony provides a helpful vocabulary in which to investigate inherent tensions in new media discourses the "methods" outlined in this chapter will largely serve that end. At the same time it is important to locate where my own perspectives on theory and method lie in order to provide clarity to the reader as to how I approach rhetorical analysis.

As previously mentioned the distinctions between theory and method are often murky. Brummett (1984) argues, "many rhetoricians view rhetorical criticism as the means to test the regularities asserted by rhetorical theory; criticism is to rhetorical theory what experiment and other methods are to social science theory" (p. 97). Numerous examples abound from influential rhetorical scholars asserting the ability of criticism to demonstrate the "testable and predictive" power of rhetorical theory (97). However, Brummett counters that "rhetorical theory and its supporting criticism as actually written, on the other hand, have characteristics which disqualify social science theory and

research as models for understanding rhetorical studies," adding that "rhetorical theory is *never* tested in the sense that social science theories are" (98). Rather the method of rhetorical analysis is often directly influenced by theory. I align myself with the perspective offered by Brummett that a "major difference between rhetorical studies and the social science model is that in rhetorical studies, the distinction between theory and method is much weaker" (99). Instead of a clear distinction Brummett offers the proposition that theory and method are intimately connected. Though not excluding other rhetorical theorists Brummett specifically focuses on the theories of Kenneth Burke in claiming, "his methods are submerged within theory" and that for rhetorical scholars "a method is the exercise of an insight engendered by the theory itself" (99). Given my own focus on Burkean concepts of irony and in keeping with the idea that these concepts be "treated as categories of critical analysis" this chapter serves to explicate those influences for the purposes of rhetorical criticism.

This does not mean, however, that there is no "method" to be spoken of in rhetorical analysis. While a critic's methods may be submerged within theory they still need to help guide the reader through the analysis of the text. Therefore it remains necessary to offer insight into how methods might possibly emerge from theory as well. This is crucial if the reader is to understand a critic's treatment of a text. Rather than testing a theory, Brummett offers a metaphor of a dance between critic and reader to explain the use of rhetorical methods. In order for the dance to work, Brummett writes, "the reader needs to be in some measure of sympathy with the critic's theory and method or at least willing to suspend judgment and disbelief long enough to see what sort of

dance the critic will lead" (2010, p.35). In this chapter I offer a series of dance steps, while asking the reader to be sympathetic toward my own choreography.

The goal of this chapter is to provide insight into how texts are selected for the analysis chapters as well as identify the ways in which theory informs that analysis. The theoretical foundation of this dissertation rests on the idea that both irony and remediation focus on the interplay of mutually influential yet contradictory terms and that tensions arising from such contradictions structure new media discourses. My purpose here is to identify how the interplay of these terms can be illustrated in rhetorical analysis. Specifically, given the focus of this dissertation on texts of new media—texts that operate in an increasingly fragmented rhetorical environment, the tensions between perspectives on rhetorical criticism offered by Michael Leff (1990, 1992) and Michael McGee (1990) seem especially salient. Identifying the critical instruments used for analysis could benefit from a further grounding in this debate.

However, I am reminded to not lose sight of the actual methods for analysis as well. While I contend it is of immense importance to focus on how irony can influence the selection (or creation) of the text, as each of the following chapters does so in different ways, it is also important to detail the strategies used to uncover the rhetorical workings of these texts. In the final part of this chapter I aim to uncover how irony and remediation can be deployed as analytical tools to aid in textual criticism.

I argue that irony, understood as operating with its own dichotomous relationship between trope and figure, provides a productive vocabulary of terms in which to understand the methodological concerns regarding the texts examined in this dissertation.

This chapter unfolds in two parts. First, I survey an influential debate in the field of communication studies regarding the locus and purpose of rhetorical criticism—the so-called Leff-McGee debate. Providing a brief account of this scholarly discussion, and my position within it, is important for this dissertation because of the nature of the texts selected in the later chapters as well as the theory underlying my approach. Since changes in technology have contributed to an increasingly fragmented rhetorical environment I argue these competing perspectives on the text be considered mutually dependent. Second, I identify how the Burkean master trope of irony can be deployed as a specific method with attention paid to how a critic can identify the presence of remediation in a text. To do so I consult Brummett's (2010) strategies for tracing irony in texts. I contend that irony, predicated on a textual "wink" between a rhetor and audience, can be similarly applied to the interplay between the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy in remediation. In applying remediation as a method the critic illustrates how the technological features of the medium aid in the creation of an ironic understanding of the text. In order to create an ironic meaning in a text some degree of interaction within and across different media forms is necessary. The critic should illustrate these interactions, especially when they invoke more than one medium, and illustrate whether the logic of immediacy or hypermediacy is most prominent. This relationship can aid the critic in uncovering elements of the text that highlight the presence of remediation as an ironic rhetorical structure. For rhetorical critics examining texts of new media this means an additional consideration of the specific media through

which these texts operate. This section includes brief descriptions of the texts and a preview of how the strategies identified in this chapter can be applied to them.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE "TEXT" IN RHETORICAL CRITICISM: LEFF VS MCGEE

In the introduction to a special issue on rhetorical criticism in the formerly named *Western Journal of Speech Communication* John Angus Campbell identifies "the state of the projects of two productive theoretical/critical artists" (1990, p. 250) whose work has proven not only influential in the field of rhetorical studies but also operate in tension with one another. The two scholars, Michael Leff and Michael Calvin McGee, are identified with methodological positions that create an opportunity to examine how rhetorical criticism may be completed in a contemporary mass mediated rhetorical environment.

Debates over the proper goals, methods, and objects of rhetorical analysis are well documented in the history of rhetorical studies (Wrage, 1947; Black 1978; Hart, 1976, 1986; McGee, 1980; Wander, 1983, McKerrow, 1989). An adequate survey of these varying perspectives can be obtained through reading nearly any of the articles cited in this chapter. What makes the tensions between Leff and McGee's positions important for this current project stems from the way in which this debate seeks to engage with contemporary developments in the ways rhetors and audiences construct and interpret texts. Furthermore, the debate circumscribes the very nature of what it means to create a text in the first place.

As Campbell asserts, "the contrasts between Leff and McGee are fundamental, thoroughgoing, and symmetrical" (1990, p. 250). Furthermore, Celeste Condit (1990) notes McGee and Leff in many ways are rearticulating a long-standing tension between Isocrates and Plato's stated positions on rhetoric. This discussion then could be seen as supporting Brummett's thesis that "scholarship runs in cycles, that there are few truly new ideas" in rhetorical scholarship (2003, p. 369). In taking up this discussion I articulate my own place within longstanding conversations of the purpose and role of rhetorical analysis. To give a fuller view of these contrasts and their importance for the methodology of this dissertation I begin with Leff's position.

First, in stressing the importance of analyzing singular exemplar texts Michael Leff seeks to reclaim the goals of the neo-Aristotelian tradition in rhetorical studies. Casting the central issue as "both fundamental and ancient" (1987, p. 1), Leff argues that rhetoric is "a universal activity that finds its habitation only in the particular" (7). He identifies his project largely as "textual criticism (or 'close reading')" that "centers on the effort to interpret the intentional dynamics of a text" (Leff, 1992, p. 223). In identifying the singular text as the locus of rhetorical analysis Leff is not arguing for a method of analysis separated from the context in which that text operates. Rather, he argues, "one of the assumptions of close reading is that meaning in a rhetorical work results from an interaction between discursive form and representational content" (257). Leff's project can be understood as what Condit (1992) characterized as "the recovery of the object" (p. 309) in rhetorical studies.

In privileging the singular text as the main object of rhetorical analysis Leff stresses an important point regarding the purpose of rhetoric: rhetorical discourses are generally created intentionally so as to connect with or persuade an audience. This is not to say that context is subjugated to the text. Rather, Leff instead reminds that a text "becomes a verbal construction that blends form and content into a concrete whole—a whole that assigns meaning to a region of shared public experience and solicits an audience to embrace the meaning it constructs" (Leff & Sachs, 1990, p. 255). As such it is important that critics bear in mind that "since it is the art of the persuasive dimension in discourse, rhetoric finds no rest at the theoretical level" (Leff, 1987, p. 7). While a pretty hefty charge I take this less as a condemnation of rhetorical *theory* per se than a reminder that rhetorical analysis remain focused on discursive products created by rhetors for specific purposes.

The argument goes that rhetoric can only be understood in its local manifestations and to do so would be to somehow betray that fundamental element of rhetorical study. Such an argument rests on the idea that the focus on singular texts, in Leff's case almost exclusively what Gaonkar (1990) would term "oratorical masterpieces" (p. 310), highlights "the peculiar and incomplete art of rhetoric" (311). While Edwin Black agrees, "it is generally true that the work of rhetoric is fragmentary outside its environment; it functions only in a particular world," he also agrees that "neo-Aristotelian critics tend, on the whole, to take a restricted view of context" (1978, p. 39). Leff's position does very little to refute this charge, especially since his rhetorical analyses tend to focus on the study of finite speeches given in a particular setting to

address a particular situation. Furthermore, many of the issues Black takes with neo-Aristotelian criticism stem from the misleading distinction between artistic and rhetorical discourse. He writes, "it misleads by assuming a distinction between poetry and rhetorical discourse which does not, in fact, exist" (46-47). This is especially the case today where speeches and public statements by political officials are increasingly embedded in larger discursive arenas often termed "popular culture." Consider, for example, the annual White House Press Correspondent's dinner where political and artistic stalwarts use traditional modes of public address for the purposes of both entertainment and commentary on the contemporary state of politics in the United States. A key addition to this argument is that the distinction also troubles the role of the critic as a participant in the creation of meaning in rhetorical discourse. Black adds that this position means "the critic's task can only be to record this re-creation, if he can, as an integral part of the rhetorical transaction he appraises; but the critic's own response to the discourse is of no consequence, since the critical response is always distinct from the auditory response" (46). Black's argument here is that according to this perspective the critic, much like the social scientist, is to take no position on the text and certainly not provide an interpretation the audience may not have come to on their own. Instead he argues the role of the critic should be focused "in part by translating the object of his criticism into the terms of his audience and in part by educating his audience to the terms of the object. This dual task is not an ancillary function of criticism; it is an essential part of criticism" (6). I take this essential aspect of criticism as a creative endeavor whereby the critic invites the reader to see the text in a particular way, not one in which the focus

is on cataloging all of the available means of persuasion in a singular rhetorical transaction. Whereas "the neo-Aristotelian critic is preoccupied with the immediate audience of the discourse" (Black, 1978, p.57) thus limiting their focus on context, Black argues the critic should be focused on larger bodies of discourse. Rather than thinking of a static audience, Black invites critics to consider context "less a specific place than a culture" (84). I recognize some foreshadowing between this argument regarding context and the now fragmentary nature of rhetoric. I turn now to McGee's position on the text.

Next, in opposing Leff's overreliance on the text, Michael McGee instead privileges the analysis of "textual fragments" (1990, p. 279). That is, the "text" on which Leff emphasizes is but a small piece of much larger bodies of discourse. In articulating his position McGee notes, "rhetors *make* discourses from scraps and pieces of evidence" (279). *Rhetoric* then is examined not by focusing on these singular fragments but rather on how those fragments combine to create a larger mosaic of meaning for audiences. In this sense there is no such thing as a "finished" or "complete" text for McGee. He continues, "the apparently finished discourse is in fact a dense reconstruction of all the bits of other discourses from which it was made" (279) inviting critics to consider the ways these bits might be analyzed in relation to one another to give a fuller account of the rhetorical process. I would add that in addition to analyzing these discursive bits that critics also draw their attention to the specific media forms from which these bits are drawn. This is where remediation provides a necessary addition to the rhetorical analysis of new media artifacts. I argue it is important to note not only how textual fragments are

combined to make discourses but also how the media from which those bits are culled interact with one another to similarly influence the meaning making process.

Rethinking the master term in rhetorical criticism can further highlight McGee's conceptualization of rhetoric. Adherents of Leff's position, McGee argues, use "criticism" as a master term. In doing so McGee argues "we assume that rhetoric is a form or genre of discourse presented for study" and that "the discourse as it is delivered to its audience/readers is considered 'finished,' whole, clearly and obviously the object (target) of critical analysis" (1990, p. 279). Instead, by privileging "rhetoric" as master term "rhetoric does not *begin* with a finished text in need of interpretation; rather texts are understood to be larger than the apparently finished discourse that presents itself as transparent" (279). To illustrate this position McGee offers Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech not as a finished text to be examined against a wider cultural backdrop but rather "as a featured part of an arrangement that includes all facts, events, texts, and stylized expressions deemed useful in explaining its influence and exposing its meaning" (279).

This rethinking of the "location" of rhetorical analysis stems from what McGee notes are profound changes in culture. He argues his position could be considered a pluralistic one if "the human condition had not changed so radically in the past seventy years" (1990, p. 284). By radical change he is alluding to the increased fragmentation characteristic of our contemporary rhetorical environment, a fragmentation similarly alluded to in the introduction to this dissertation. Giving a brief rundown of major cultural, political, and most importantly technological developments throughout the 20th

century McGee argues, "a persuasive history of the twentieth century could be written with the motif that presumed homogeneity has been replaced by the presumption of cultural heterogeneity" (285). Noting that culture, particularly mediated popular culture, has had a profound impact on how individuals experience common rhetorical moments (or don't) McGee argues, "there is no longer a homogenous body of knowledge that constitutes common education of everyone" resulting in an increasingly "fractured and fragmented American culture" and that "contemporary discourses reflect this fragmentation" (286). Think, for example, of the multiplicity of news outlets and television channels all but ensuring that audiences cannot entirely share in the viewing of these cultural products. As such, McGee claims it is both unnecessary and impossible to focus on a "text" as a finite, finished product for analysis.

One notable aspect of McGee's textual perspective involves the impact of technology on fragmentation. McGee writes, "changes in discourse practices have been so obviously dramatic that several theorists portray new communication technologies as *the cause* of cultural fracturing" (1990, p. 286). While McGee does not choose to weigh in on whether or not this causal claim is accurate (nor do I wish to rehash this discussion in this chapter) he argues, "however we got there, the human *condition* has changed" (286) and this change manifests most visibly in discursive practices. "Scholars are all analysts at heart" writes McGee, "but nothing in our new environment is complete enough, finished enough, to analyze—and the fragments that present themselves to us do not stand still long enough to analyze" (286-87). This revelation is of immense importance for this dissertation. The manners by which texts are experienced,

constructed, and analyzed are increasingly influenced by technological developments. Specifically with social media outlets texts constantly exhibit potential for revision, updating, manipulation, sharing, and commenting. These additions often become part of the text as well as provide context for others. As such rhetoricians would be wise to consider the impacts such technology has on these textual experiences when determining what the object of rhetorical analysis is to be examined. Or as Roderick Hart proclaimed in reference to McGee, in a mass mediated age we now increasingly "*live in a soup of rhetoric*" (1986, p. 310).

To sum up the distinction: Leff argues that singular texts are the primary habitation of rhetoric, with rhetoric only existing as it is manifested in these particular instances of discourse. This position both works within and against Black's (1978) argument that critics should focus on larger contexts than immediate audiences and move beyond the emphasis on cataloguing persuasive appeals. Conversely, McGee argues that these same particular instances are never themselves finished, nor can they be, and must be instead understood as fragments of much larger discursive formations, similarly echoing Black's position. Put another way, for Leff the text is something left behind for the critic to interpret while for McGee the purpose of the rhetorical critic relies on "*inventing a text suitable for criticism*" (1990, p. 288).

I advocate that critics consider these positions as mutually influential. I argue the perspectives offered by Leff and McGee depend on one another. If irony structures the contradictory yet mutually dependent logics of immediacy and hypermediacy in the process of remediation, a similar structure can be articulated with regard to the

perspectives on method discussed here. If a rhetorical "method is the exercise of an insight engendered by the theory itself" (Brummett, 1984, p. 99) then establishing the tension between text and fragment as a contradictory yet mutually dependent relationship establishes a productive approach to rhetorical analysis in the following chapters. In order to understand McGee's concept of textual fragmentation it is necessary to understand Leff's advocacy for the singular text. With regards to the object of study Leff concedes, "I regard ideographs as fragments that appear in texts" while "McGee views the ideograph as a kind of text…and what I call a text (e.g. Lincoln's 'Second Inaugural') is a fragment" (Leff, 1992, p. 224). In acknowledging the mutual influences Leff calls not to find areas of agreement per se, instead preferring to acknowledge where these disagreements may prove helpful methodologically. He continues, "while others quite reasonably advocate synthesis, I would prefer to hold the two orientations in a dialectical relationship" (Leff, 1992, p. 226). A focus on the internal iconicity of a text, where "meaning in a rhetorical work results from an interaction between discursive form and representational content" (Leff & Sachs, 1990, p. 257), serves to update Leff's previous position to account for valid challenges posed by the undeniable fragmentation of culture. That is, his position is essentially remediated to address those challenges. Bolter and Grusin (2000) argue that remediation denotes a process whereby older media forms are repeatedly refashioned to address challenges posed by newer media forms, newer forms that are themselves understood primarily in relation to the older forms they are updating. These "newer" and "older" forms of media are held in a mutually dependent tension that

enables changes in one to influence changes in the other. I argue the same process is apparent in the dialectical relationship between Leff and McGee.

The significance of this mutually influential relationship becomes clearer when considering the technologically mediated nature of the texts to be examined in this dissertation. Leff and Sachs argue, "between these two approaches, there exists a kind of textual criticism that views the rhetorical work, not as a mirror of reality, but as a field of action unified in a functional and locally stable product" (1990, p. 255). I argue this locally stable product predicated on the collapsing of form into content or vice versa is created via a mutual dependency on fragmented rhetorical objects. In this sense a locally stable product can function as a text that is "finished enough" to bracket for the purposes of rhetorical analysis. This is of immense importance to this current study because of the focus on remediation and the discursive features of new media. In calling for further research Condit suggests that this issue regarding the role of the text in rhetorical criticism is "deeply rooted in our age, whose central paradox is defined by the growth of technology" (1990, p. 342). Acknowledging McGee's point on fragmentation while warning against a wholesale adoption of the fragment over the text Condit highlights that technological developments have increasingly allowed for the creation of rhetorical products that can be constantly updated, manipulated, and edited.[11] Thus a locally stable, or finished enough, text is what the critic now has at their disposal. I argue each of the case studies presented in this dissertation function heavily as the type of locally stable

[11] And not all in the same way, as these affordances differ depending on the specific medium used. The ability to post, edit, and respond to texts is different on Twitter than it is on Facebook or Tumblr for example

products that stem from the mutually dependent relationship between Leff's text and McGee's fragment. In attempting to provide a compelling analysis of these texts I also attempt to create a compelling text worthy of such analysis. The differences in these mediated forms contribute to the physical context of ironic discourse and should be accounted for when analyzing how these texts function ironically. Remediation helps the critic illustrate how these formal differences contribute to the interplay between rhetor and audience. The texts examined in the following case study chapters aim to make this perspective more explicit. In the next section I detail a series of methodological tools informed by irony and remediation used to analyze these texts.

IRONY AND REMEDIATION AS A "METHOD" OF ANALYSIS

As previously articulated the theoretical foundation of this dissertation rests on remediation as an ironic rhetorical structure. My overall argument is that remediation is a rhetorical structure underlying mediated public discourse and that this structure is ironic, with irony understood primarily as dialectic (Burke, 1969a). Though a major focus of this chapter involves an ironic understanding of texts in rhetorical criticism, particularly when examining Internet texts, it is also important to uncover how remediation functions rhetorically in these texts to get a better understanding of the thesis. To do so I draw from Brummett's (2010) *Techniques of Close Reading* to offer insight into how the critic (and reader) can identify the rhetorical workings of irony and remediation within texts.

First, since my theoretical argument claims remediation functions as an ironic structure, drawing primarily from Kenneth Burke's "Four Master Tropes" (1969a),

Brummett's focus on techniques for identifying these tropes in texts is particularly useful. Focusing on textual *transformations* or the "elements of texts in which one thing seems to be another" (Brummett, 2010, p. 73) the master tropes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony provide ways of uncovering these elements. I will focus primarily on the trope of irony.

In identifying techniques for tracing irony in rhetorical texts it is important to "note that irony is heavily dependent on context" (Brummett, 2010, p. 91). That is, for both the critic and reader the meaning of an ironic text is significantly influenced by social and cultural elements outside of the text. Echoing similar sentiments expressed by McGee (1990) the context has as much influence on the meaning of a text as the text itself, particularly if the text is understood as ironic. Brummett identifies this as the *historical* context, "the sense of what is going on socially, politically, in the day's events" (2010, p. 10). Additionally, aligning somewhat with Leff's argument regarding iconicity there is an internal element of context that affects how meaning is interpreted in discourse. Brummett identifies this as the *textual* context whereby, "texts often set up their own contexts that guide reading" (10). If an audience initially understands a text as a certain type of rhetorical discourse then they are likely to interpret the rest of the text similarly, with those textual features influencing others. For example, Brummett explains "if we are reading a book that has been ironic, playful, and funny all along, we are much more likely to read further passages of the book as ironic, even if they appear to be deadly earnest" (10).

In identifying the trope of irony as a technique of close reading Brummett reminds critics of irony's relationship to dialectic. Focusing on how irony can help critics uncover various meanings in texts a critic must be mindful of "the back-and-forth of two voices, stances, or perspectives that achieve an understanding" (Brummett, 2010, p. 92). Earlier I argued irony works as both strategy and structure influenced by, but not solely relegated to, humor. This claim can be extended from a theoretical concern to a methodological strategy. For critics interested in how an ironic rhetorical structure encompasses discourses beyond those generally interpreted as humorous it is important to again note that "irony depends on dialectic as much as it does humor and sarcasm" (94).

In order to employ irony as a critical technique Brummett argues it is thus important "to see irony's core not as sarcasm or humor but as the back-and-forth of understanding that has to go on between people for irony to work" (92). I would disagree slightly and add that irony's core is not *solely* as sarcasm and humor, and that those origins cannot be entirely removed from the critical instrument. Much like McGee's (1990) argument that context cannot be removed from text if said text is to have any meaning, I argue that keeping irony's rather strong relationship to humor in mind is important to understand how an ironic rhetorical criticism bridges techniques of joke telling to broader discourses that do not initially seem humorous, such as those of Occupy Wall Street examined in Chapter 6. That is, irony's relationship to humor cannot be entirely removed from the mind of the critic when employing it as a strategy of close reading. In keeping with this theoretical origin "the close reader should therefore also be

on the lookout for irony based on an understanding created dialectically with an audience, in addition to an irony that is sarcastic or humorous" (Brummett, 2010, p. 93).

The link to humor is an important one that must be stressed, particularly given humor's socializing function (Meyer, 2000). The creation of a shared relationship between speaker and audience, in that they both "get" the joke without need for further explanation, is a major rhetorical feature of humor. Ironic texts are quite often understood as humorous as well, with the audience invited to share in the creation of meaning through a textual "winking at each other, as we all understand the game of meaning reversal that is being played" (Brummett, 2010, p.92). It is the recognition of this winking that creates a dialectical bond between rhetor and audience. For this reason Brummett argues much of the "rhetorical work of irony is to cement social bonds" (92). A critic should illustrate the presence of these "winks" while also highlighting how they imply various audiences.

One way to note these various audiences is for the critic to be mindful of ways in which audiences may not recognize the rhetorical wink of an ironic text. Relating back to the distinction between stable and unstable irony in Chapter 2 noting how individuals may not participate in the intended shared meaning of a text is similarly important, particularly in this dissertation. Since the etymological origins of irony denote an element of mockery it is useful for the critic to also highlight areas where an audience may not recognize discourse as ironic. If "most texts can be seen in more than one way" (Brummett, 2010, p. 35), and irony creates a dialectic between speaker and audience predicated on a textual "wink" then identifying potentially unstable (that is,

unintentional) ironies is important. This is particularly the case with the text examined in Chapter 4, where multiple ironic meanings can be uncovered. The Tumblr blog *Literally Unbelievable* contains posts where audiences are invited to recognize a stable irony, articles from satirical news publication *The Onion*. At the same time an extra layer of textual winking is created given that the posts come from Facebook whereby the individual initially posting the article remains unaware of its deliberately ironic stance. In being able to recognize a person's misrecognition of ironic discourse, the audiences for Literally Unbelievable are thus invited to share in a joke that operates on multiple levels of ironic meaning.

Finally, the focus on irony methodologically is well suited to remediation as well because of the focus on revealing dialectic tensions in texts. Bolter and Grusin explain remediation is a process whereby newer media forms, "function in a constant dialectic with earlier media, precisely as each earlier medium functioned when it was introduced" (2000, p. 50). The difference between irony and remediation from a methodological standpoint can be understood as a difference in contextual setting. Brummett writes, "the social, physical, or historical context within which texts are placed can help readers know when to read something ironically" (2010, p. 91). I contend remediation necessitates understanding the physical context as a mediated context. That is it is necessary for the critic to now also consider the specific medium through which an ironic tension between rhetor and audience is created. Whereas irony as a method is heavily dependent on discursive contexts (the relationship between text and audience set against a backdrop of other related texts and audiences), remediation as a method is heavily dependent on the

context created by the medium through which these texts operate. This dialectic relationship plays out via the mutually dependent logics of immediacy and hypermediacy. Like irony they function in a dialectic pairing to create meaning in a text by forcing the critic to consider how the formal characteristics of these media create a kind of online backdrop against which these texts operate. Highlighting occurrences of this pairing is a key role for the critic. The reader then should be invited to recognize how these incommensurable logics operating within the text itself simultaneously interact to create an ironic meaning.

While both logics of immediacy and hypermediacy are present in any text the critic can also work to identify which logic is more predominant. That is the critic should consider whether or not the text operates in a medium that works to efface its own presence (as in the case of film) or one that works primarily to make its presence known (as in the case of social media). Illustrating the presence of irony in these texts would similarly be influenced by the technological characteristics of these media. Analyzing remediation on the Internet poses a unique opportunity from a methodological perspective because of its emphasis on hypermediacy, necessitating critics to acknowledge the very medium through which these texts operate. Bolter and Grusin argue the windowed style of "networked communication on the Internet" (2000, p. 257) primarily emphasizes the logic of hypermediacy, "because they are hypertextual: they connect users in a web of interrelated textual elements and compel users to acknowledge the medium as they communicate" (257-258). Internet users are largely compelled to access online media through specific interfaces that rely on a graphical interface similar

to desktop operating systems, with multiple "windows" and tabs often open simultaneously and layered over one another on a screen. Interpreting and creating texts in this context necessitates a consideration of how these textual forms interact. Extending an ironic rhetorical analysis to remediation therefore involves detailing how the interplay of media forms contributes to the meaning of the text posited by the critic. This extension works by making explicit how the technological features of the medium exert influence on the interpretation of the text within that medium. Remediation allows the critic to highlight subtle differences in each medium and how those differences are negotiated when different media forms are juxtaposed to aid in creating an ironic meaning. It matters that the formal characteristics of messages constructed via Facebook differ slightly from those constructed via Twitter. It matters how embedding a text from one medium in another (such as a news article embedded on a Facebook feed that allow for an immediate comment thread) is different from including a hypertext link that must be clicked in order to view (such as a news article referenced in a tweet that is not immediately visible to users). Accounting for these subtle differences is what makes remediation a necessary addition to ironic analysis of texts of new media. While remediation and irony may share a similar dialectic structure, they still highlight different features of a text. Each must be considered, in relation to one another, in order to give a fuller rhetorical picture of online mediated texts.

An additional tool to augment analysis is perspective by incongruity. Highlighted in the previous chapter as Burke's "method for gauging situations by verbal 'atom cracking'" (1984b, p. 308) whereby a rhetor takes a term from one category (or context)

and intentionally places it in another, perspective by incongruity provides a way to examine intentional juxtapositions of terms within texts that contribute to the ironic "meaning" of that text. While not intended to occupy the critic's main focus when reading the text, keying in to ways in which terms and phrases are intentionally wrested from one context and placed in another enables the critic to reveal dialectic tensions between rhetors and audience.

I argue this can also provide a useful technique for examining the interplay of immediacy and hypermediacy in creating meaning in a text. Perspective by incongruity can help denote elements of a text where the presence of one logic influences the other. In other words, perspective by incongruity can help both critic and reader note where the ironic meaning of text is stemming from juxtapositions between immediacy and hypermediacy. This will be most pronounced in Chapter 4 where an unstable irony contributes to the creation largely stable irony via the remediation of Facebook posts within Tumblr. Key to this idea is Burke's argument that perspective by incongruity involves an intentional "misnaming" of a situation in order to reveal motives that are not readily apparent. In reading a Facebook post from an individual whom does not recognize the ironic wink of an article from *The Onion* the audience of *Literally Unbelievable* is prompted to recognize the presence of the very cultural logics the initial article was intending to satirize. I argue understanding the networked interplay of media forms (Facebook, Tumblr, and news web sites) contributes to the meaning of the text.

Perspective by incongruity also provides an important compliment to an ironic remediated reading of texts in Chapter 5 when examining the satirical Twitter account

@BPGlobalPR. A strategy often deployed in this text involves an ironic wink accompanying a link to news articles about the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. In order to recognize the intended ironic wink, the reader must first click the link to the other webpage, placing one medium (a news website) within another (a Twitter feed) thus remaking the meaning of the initial statement in the text preceding the hyperlink. The text examined here therefore requires an explicit engagement with other texts in order to fully capture its rhetorical function by reinterpreting the initial statement. The ironic meaning of the text is created through the process of remediation, achieved by a perspective by incongruity.

In chapter 6 I extend the use of irony and remediation as methodological tools when charting the use of various tropes in various texts associated with Occupy Wall Street. While more predicated on a fragmentary textual construction than in the previous two chapters similar techniques can still be applied to aid the reader in understanding how tensions between discourses of institutional/non-institutional vernacular discourse as well as tensions between public/private function in a mutually dependent relationship. Though not specifically humorous or satirical in nature like the previous case studies, I argue that they employ similar rhetorical elements and serve as a reminder of the "elements of texts in which one thing seems to be another" (Brummett, 2010, p. 73). The inclusion of humorous memes that incorporate and extend rhetorical discourses from Occupy Wall Street further highlights these rhetorical relationships.

To sum up the critical process I return to Brummett's summary of irony as a close reading technique:

> We noted that dialectic is key to a wider meaning of irony: the creation of an *exchange* between the speaker or writer and the reader of a text, in which each knows to turn the literal meaning of an utterance and that they are meant to do so. This kind of textual winking or creation of an interplay between parties to irony helps to cement social bonds, as people exercise their shared knowledge to arrive at an understanding (2010, p. 96).

To this process I added that a critic could identify the presence remediation in texts by noting a similar interplay between the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy. Additionally, I added that a perspective by incongruity serves as a helpful complement to further identify the presence of contradictory discourses that work together to create an ironic meaning in a text. The strategy of reading a text ironically, with irony understood as dialectic, can be similarly applied to the dual logics of remediation and aided by a consideration of perspective by incongruity to uncover a deeper meaning of the text. Adapting the trope of irony to better understand the rhetorical process of remediation is then uniquely suited to examining the texts in the following chapters.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I outlined the several perspectives on rhetorical method. I articulated how rhetorical theory informs method in a manner distinct from other modes of scholarly inquiry. I then offered several ways in which the theoretical foundation described in the previous chapter informs the specific approach to the artifacts examined

in the upcoming chapters. Drawing upon a debate in the literature over the proper locus of the rhetorical object I argued irony and remediation influence a methodological perspective by allowing critics to highlight how new media forms contribute to a mutually dependent relationship between text and context. This chapter concluded with a discussion of how irony and remediation can be deployed as methodological tools to aid both critic and reader in seeing these rhetorical features of a text while giving a preview of what such features might look like in the following case studies. In the next chapter I begin to make these features more explicit.

Chapter 4: Irony and Remediation in an Analysis of *Literally Unbelievable*

In this chapter I provide analysis of the first of three case studies aimed at revealing an ironic remediation in new media discourses. The website *Literally Unbelievable* offers a straightforward description of its content: "Stories from The Onion as Interpreted by Facebook"[12] Created in 2011 by freelance comedy writer Hudson Hongo the site attempts to catalogue and comment on the numerous examples of articles from *The Onion* mistakenly posted by Facebook users as legitimate. The ensuing comments made by the original user or individuals in their social network commenting on the post make clear that the intended satirical humor of *The Onion* is lost. Furthermore, individuals attempting to correct mistaken commenters as to the faux nature of the news site are often unsuccessful at doing so. Readers of *Literally Unbelievable* are then invited to share in the creation of an unintentional joke stemming from others' misrecognition of satire as reality.

However this website is more than an exercise in unintentional Internet humor. The past several years have witnessed numerous examples where individuals have mistakenly posted satirical news articles as if legitimate news. Eric Umansky (2000) identifies several instances where, "journalists aren't immune to *The Onion*'s motto: 'You are dumb'" (p. 12), specifically citing examples from both *The Times* of London and *Forbes* where journalists had quoted articles from *The Onion* as fact, and without

[12] Subheading found on the homepage of http://literallyunbelievable.org

attribution. The official "motto" from *The Onion* is decidedly tongue-in-cheek, a humorous send-up of more famous newspaper mottos such as *The New York Times*' "All the News That's Fit to Print." At the same time, there is an irony to *The Onion*'s motto when considering that many individuals and organizations have been fooled by the *The Onion*'s parody of legitimate news outlets. In perhaps the most famous case Louisiana GOP Congressman, and licensed M.D., John Fleming posted an article from *The Onion* to his official Facebook page in 2012, with the headline reading, "Planned Parenthood Opens $8 Billion Abortionplex" (Horowitz, 2012). By all accounts Fleming posted the story under the assumption that it was a factual story, likely because it aligned with a prevailing narrative in mainstream Republican Party politics regarding the goals of reproductive healthcare organization Planned Parenthood. Foreign news agencies have fallen "prey" to *The Onion*'s brand of satire as well. The same year as Fleming's post Chinese newspaper *The People's Daily* cited an article from *The Onion* naming North Korean leader Kim Jong Un as the "Sexiest Man Alive for 2012" (CNN, 2012). A local television news anchor in Alabama did the same on their Facebook page, even going so far as to contact the firm named in *The Onion* article, "PR Firm Advises U.S. To Cut Ties With Alabama" (Hongo, 2013).

Rhetorical scholars have largely studied *The Onion* by focusing on how ironic satire carves out a discursive space to challenge prevailing political narratives and invites readers to share in such challenges, particularly in the mass mediated political climate following the events of 9/11 (Achter, 2008; Warner, 2011; Waisanen, 2011). This current chapter directs that discussion toward how the rhetorical structure of said mass mediated

climate influences how individuals interpret (and more importantly misinterpret) ironic and satirical discourses. While numerous examples of *The Onion* being mistaken for legitimate news abound, especially in online forums, *Literally Unbelievable* is perhaps the most comprehensive collection of these posts on the Internet. As of this writing in June of 2014 the website contains more than 250 pages of examples, more than 25,000 in total, culled from throughout Facebook. In addition to influential politicians, news agencies, and celebrities the vast majority of posts have come from anonymous individuals who have had their identities hidden, but not their comments.

For the purposes of this dissertation this website provides an excellent case study to investigate the rhetorical relationship between irony and remediation for several reasons. First, it provides an interesting opportunity to investigate the relationship between stable and unstable irony in constructing meaning in a text. Second, the text itself is constructed of multiple textual fragments taken from multiple media, with those fragments taking on new meanings as they are remediated from one medium into another. This textual construction provides an excellent opportunity to identify existing rhetorical features of remediation. Finally, this site reveals an intriguing perspective on one of the major paradoxes outlined in the introduction to this dissertation regarding news and information in an Internet age: Individuals seem to have access to more information about our world than any other time in history while at the same time misinformation runs rampant (Mindich, 2005). *Literally Unbelievable* remediates *Onion* articles that have themselves been remediated through Facebook to construct an intentional ironic meaning from a fragment that could be considered unintentional irony. I contend this

may help add insight into how individuals actually experience information that runs counter to their beliefs while also providing some (perhaps unintentional) commentary on the difficulties of correcting inaccurate information that proliferates throughout the Internet.

In this chapter I argue that the website *Literally Unbelievable* (which is itself located via the social blogging site Tumblr) works via an ironic remediation through the display of unintentionally humorous Facebook posts of *Onion* articles as if they are legitimate news. This ironic remediation offers an ability to investigate how the rhetorical features of new media reveal ideological complications in new media discourse. This chapter contains two parts. First, I briefly survey literature drawn largely from political communication and science regarding political knowledge, selective exposure, and correcting misperceptions in contemporary media environments. This includes a review of empirical studies aimed at understanding how individuals are exposed to information, how that exposure has become more limited as options have increased in the Internet age, and how political humor has played a role in these developments. Next, locating these studies as part of the larger context of news and information in mass mediated public discourse I analyze multiple posts from *Literally Unbelievable* with a focus on the strategies outlined in the methods chapter. Specifically I focus on irony as dialectic between audiences, shifts from stable to unstable irony, and the presence of hypermediacy as contributing to the meaning for the reader of the site. This is accomplished by highlighting how the ironic meaning of the article headline is

reinterpreted in relation to the comments made on the Facebook post. I also make efforts to highlight how this refashioned ironic meaning is rhetorically produced through remediation, with articles from one medium (*The Onion*) placed inside another medium (Facebook). I conclude the chapter with possible implications to consider for the next chapter.

POLITICAL IDEOLOGY, SELECTIVE EXPOSURE, AND MOTIVATED REASONING IN ONLINE NEWS

The ironic remediation of *The Onion* in *Literally Unbelievable* is set within a larger context of news and partisanship in a mass mediated age. Paul Achter (2008) explains, "much of *The Onion*'s criticism is directed at the ability of the news media to inform citizens and improve democratic practice through discourse" (p. 281). In mimicking the style of print, now remediated through the medium of online news, *The Onion* focuses its satirical humor on the structure of contemporary mass mediated journalism. In this section I outline some of the major issues to which scholars have focused in understanding how individuals understand, interpret, and obtain information about political and social events. This section is primarily concerned with work from the fields of political communication and political science given that there has been considerable research in those areas on how individuals are exposed and react to mediated information about the world around them. Specifically I focus on studies pertaining to political knowledge, motivated reasoning, and selective exposure. Since much of the humor in *Literally Unbelievable* stems from misinterpretation or outright

refusal to accept correcting information regarding the "accuracy" of the source of information engaging such research is important. This survey is not exhaustive as there are numerous studies investigating how individuals understand and interpret news from a variety of sources in a wide array of contexts. My aim here is to set the scene by drawing attention to several major developments as they pertain to irony, satire, and remediation. This section concludes by identifying some parallels between this research and research on irony and satire.

First, researchers have noted strong correlations among political knowledge, socioeconomic status, and education. Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien (1970) note a fundamental and repeatedly confirmed hypothesis regarding the process of acquiring political knowledge in a mass media age: "as the infusion of mass media information into a social system increases, segments of the population with higher socioeconomic status tend to acquire this information at a faster rate than the lower status segments" (p. 160). Socioeconomic status and education level, often viewed as strongly correlated, do function as important influencing factors on how individuals acquire knowledge of political and social issues, but with important caveats. Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien identify several contributing factors for this relationship including communication skills, previous background knowledge, relevant social contacts, selective exposure to information, and perhaps most importantly for this dissertation "the nature of the mass media system that delivers this information" (162). In addition to relevant social, political, and economic conditions differences in medium serve as a contributing factor to the acquisition of knowledge. They note that many studies of political knowledge

"concentrated to a great extent on *print* aspects of mass publicity and may not apply to learning from television—at least, perhaps, not to the same extent" (170). Major technological developments over the last several decades would certainly influence this process as well. If television news remediates print news and the Internet remediates both (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) then the process by which individuals would obtain and interpret knowledge in these new media forms would likely be remediated as well.

The sheer wealth of information is another contributing factor to whether or not a person obtains relevant political knowledge. Beginning with the proliferation of numerous newspaper outlets, cable television channels, and through the widespread adoption of the Internet, individuals have more choices with regard to obtaining information about their world. They may also be paralyzed by such choices, particularly when it comes to determining accuracy or usefulness of the information. In the United States the first decade of the 21st century witnessed a massive proliferation of news sources among print, television, and especially online sources. Many of these sources have been noted for their specific ideological filters through which news is reported. The proliferation of ideologically charged media outlets was accompanied by a wide polarization of views on political and social issues of the time, with the 2003 invasion of Iraq serving as a primary example. Jacobson (2010) argued the "availability of ideologically diverse news outlets also facilitated what emerged from these myriad processes as the most polarized distribution of partisan opinions on a president and a war ever measured" (p. 51). Parsing through information, especially when that information

conflicts with partisan views, is complicated by the proliferation of outlets catering to multiple ideological viewpoints yet still operating under the umbrella of news.

Next, working within this mediated news environment individuals have developed a series of strategies to interpret and cope with what can seem like an overload of ideologically diverse information. Nyhan and Reifler (2010) note several empirical studies that suggest, "citizens can successfully use heuristics, or information shortcuts, as a substitute for detailed factual information in some circumstances" (p. 304). One of the most important shortcuts involves political partisanship, where one's political identification functions as the primary determinant with how to interpret a news story. This is particularly the case when a story is either ambiguous or presents information that can have multiple interpretations. Since an individual's "political beliefs about controversial factual questions in politics are often closely linked with one's ideological preferences or partisan beliefs," (307) information obtained from news sources will be interpreted along similar partisan lines. This is troublesome when information obtained is factually incorrect or misleading. Attempts to empirically study such phenomena are tricky because "such authoritative statements of fact (such as those provided by a survey interviewer to a subject) are not reflective of how citizens typically receive information" (304). Unlike empirical research settings where variables can be reasonably controlled individuals are rarely, if ever, presented with objective correcting information in their social groups. Instead, as Nyhan and Reifler point out "people typically receive corrective information within 'objective' news reports pitting two sides of an argument against each other, which is significantly more ambiguous than receiving a correct

answer from an omniscient source" (304). The Internet would certainly exacerbate this situation where information is increasingly networked and operating in relation to other sources of information, creating a situation where mental shortcuts would prove increasingly ineffective in correcting misperceptions.

Furthermore, political partisanship as a mental shortcut has proven to be remarkably persistent. Even in situations where information can be proven demonstrably false, individuals may be less likely to accept that information if it is inconsistent with their political views. Rather than correcting information, there is evidence to suggest that attempts to correct misperceptions may actually have the opposite effect. Nyhan and Reifler identify this phenomenon as the "backfire effect" whereby the presence of correcting information may "actually *strengthen* misperceptions among ideological subgroups in several cases" (2010, p. 323). For example during the invasion of Iraq, particularly as the military conflict endured and justifications continuously shifted, individuals differed widely in their opinions on the war even after new information cast serious doubt on many of the initial premises. Jacobson (2010) noted this occurrence as a prime example of "motivated reasoning" whereby people "defend current beliefs and attitudes against discordant information by some combination of avoiding, disbelieving, misperceiving, misremembering, or forgetting it" (p. 34). Extending Tichenor et al.'s (1970) focus on political knowledge gaps to a focus on political attitudes toward that knowledge Jacobson suggests the more strongly held one's attitude toward a controversial topic the more likely they will engage in significant psychological work to justify those attitudes in the face of contradicting information. This is especially the case

where situations are more complex or ambiguous. Irony would certainly complicate this process since ironic humor often plays on ambiguous or complex meanings (Booth, 1974; Hutcheon, 2004). Warner (2011) explains that ambiguities over meaning are a primary feature of *The Onion*'s ironic satire, giving an initial explanation as to why individuals coming across these stories online would interpret them so differently than intended.

Another feature noted by scholars regarding political misperceptions involves the confidence in which individuals seem to express inaccurate information. In their study of political misperceptions and the effects of corrections Nyhan and Reifler (2010) revealed, "the least informed people expressed the highest confidence in their answers" (p. 305). That is, those who had the least accurate information on an issue were also the most confident in expressing their views regarding that information. This may explain why someone would be willing to post an inaccurate or "fake" (in *The Onion* sense) story as true. If the story somehow confirms prior attitudes, no matter how outrageous, and the individual is confident in expressing that view as accurate, they would be more likely to post a story as if it were real. Additionally, political views need not be the only ideological factor influencing an interpretation of controversial information. Jacobson (2010) further noted that religious views played a role in the acceptance or rejection of information about the second Iraq war. Those with strong evangelical Christian beliefs were more likely to believe the decisions of then president George W. Bush as divinely inspired (as well as the accuracy of media reports touting such connections) and as such were more likely to accept given rationales for military intervention regardless of correcting information.

Admittedly there can be a tendency to assume that those who hold these discordant views are those lower on the socioeconomic and educational scale. However, this is not entirely true (even if our own heuristics will it so). Despite Tichenor et al.'s earlier argument that education and socioeconomic status generally result in increased political knowledge, Jacobson (2010) indicates, "greater knowledge and sophistication do not necessarily produce greater objectivity in processing information" (p. 35). While socioeconomic status and education generally result in more accurate and objective political knowledge (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970) individuals of all competencies will tend to use their political attitudes to filter information. While this is not necessarily cause for alarm in principle, it does suggest a major challenge toward correcting misperceptions when the information in question is viewed as politically controversial. If an individual is highly motivated to adhere to certain ideological worldview it becomes increasingly difficult to convince them otherwise, even if that information is demonstrably false.

Next, ideological influences in interpreting discordant information are further influenced by medium. As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, an increasingly fragmented media environment has lead to an increase in selective exposure to information. Talia Stroud (2010) notes that particularly in the case of online forums individuals display a tendency to selectively expose themselves to information that already confirms predisposed political and cultural views. Cass Sunstein (2007) characterized this phenomenon as an "echo chamber" where individuals are increasingly exposed only to information filtered through viewpoints in which they already agree,

hindering engagement with information that runs counter to those pre-held views. He argues the Internet has enabled the proliferation of these echo chambers where "thousands or perhaps millions or even tens of millions of people are mainly listening to louder echoes of their own voices" (p. 13). And as the previous studies point out, even if one were to encounter information from ideologically diverse sources, or perceived ideologically diverse sources, they are still likely to mold that information into confirming their original position. In order to better account for this process Stroud (2010) reminds researchers to focus on "the characteristics of both the media and media consumer when analyzing the media's political effects" (p. 571). The focus of this chapter is to account for ironic meanings stemming from *The Onion* articles remediated through Facebook to create a dialectic among multiple audiences (the individuals making the initial post, members of their social networks, the author of *Literally Unbelievable*, and readers of *Literally Unbelievable*). In what follows below I argue that *Literally Unbelievable* provides a strong account of the various characteristics of new media discourses and their potential effects on audiences through the negotiation of ironic meanings in ambiguous satirical texts. I next identify several parallels among research on political knowledge, irony, and satire.

Finally, research studies in humor, especially political humor, have revealed quite similar results to those outlined above. This is especially the case with political partisanship. LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam (2009) found empirical evidence to suggest that viewers of *The Colbert Report* tend to view the humor of the show as ideologically consistent with their partisan position regardless of party identification.

Making the case that the rhetorical features of satire heavily influence this development they contend, "Colbert's deadpan satire and commitment to character do not provide viewers with the external cues or source recognition" (p. 216). Since *The Colbert Report* relies heavily on parody, mimicking the heavily bombastic and narcissistic style of cable news pundits, in order to make satirical statements about mass mediated politics the program does not explicitly reveal itself as humorous. However, LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam continue that while viewers of all partisan perspectives found the show humorous, they differed on whom the targets of the jokes were, with the differences being determined primarily along partisan lines. Nyhan and Reifler (2010) argued, "partisans and ideologues tend to view identical content as biased against them" (315). In the case of political satire there is evidence to suggest a similar effect with regards to the target of a joke.

Other researchers have noted similar phenomena with respect to humor and satire. Gring-Pemble and Watson (2003) noted satire might foster an unintended "backfire effect" of its own, with individuals often accepting a more moderate acceptance of a position a satirical text was attempting to critique. So just as individuals "may come to support their opinion *even more strongly*" (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010, p. 308) satire audiences may miss the underlying message intended by the rhetor and instead rely on their own partisan heuristics to interpret the meaning of a text. Similarly, John Meyer (2000) explains that humor is can function as much to divide as it does unite discursive communities. In the case of irony where recognizing and sharing a hidden meaning can "cement social bonds" (Brummett, 2010, p. 92) it becomes especially important to also

account for how and why individuals may be excluded from said bonds. As the analysis in this chapter indicates individuals who do not share in the intended ironic meaning of *The Onion* contribute (though perhaps unwillingly) to the creation of an unintended ironic meaning that takes shape in relation to the original post, and remediated across media. In the next section I give a brief overview of *The Onion*'s influence in a new media discursive environment.

THE ONION IN AN AGE OF NEW MEDIA

Originating in 1988 as a collaboration of former University of Wisconsin students and journalists, *The Onion* is now one of the most popular sites on the Internet (Warner, 2011; Waisanen, 2011). Sarah Kessler of the technology and social media news website *Mashable* notes through its successful use of satire and parody of journalistic forms, along with a keen sense of awareness of how online news environments operate *The Onion* has garnered more than 3 million followers on Twitter, which is more than the combined number of followers for more traditional news publications *Time, Newsweek,* and *The Economist* combined (Kessler, 2011). Though *The Onion* ceased its print edition at the end of 2013 (Abbruzzese, 2013)[13] it has accumulated numerous accolades for its satirical parody of the newspaper, and by extension news site. *The Onion* works by mimicking the form of print and online news. Achter (2008) notes *The Onion*'s "rhetorical architecture shares many qualities of the real news media" (p. 281), citing the publication's adherence to the Associated Press (AP) style guide as an example. This

[13] The headline on the front page of the final print edition read "Onion' Print Revenues Up 5,000%."

mimicking of form, central to parody, is also key to *The Onion*'s use of irony. Warner (2011) writes, "to achieve the double layer of meaning necessary for irony, *The Onion* must look like a newspaper and it does" with "sections very similar to the online versions of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*" (p. 65). *The Onion* appears to be as real as possible, and this prima facie appearance is perhaps its defining rhetorical characteristic. That it is not a "real" newspaper despite appearances "helps create the ambiguity in meaning necessary for irony" (65). Since ambiguity was cited as a major factor influencing the persistence of political misperceptions (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010) it would make sense that not everyone will interpret *The Onion*'s humor in the same way, just as they would not do the same with other ambiguous texts (LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009), especially since irony is heavily dependent on a shared meaning between rhetor and audience.

Parodying the journalistic form is also what enables *The Onion* to appear as convincing as legitimate news. Warner (2011) continues, "the sober and seemingly impartial language and layout of a newspaper also gives the content an air or legitimacy, objectivity, and respectability which then allows an automatic contrast with both the judgmental, yet mischievous and funny, satirical content of many of the articles" (p. 65). These contrasts are perhaps most pronounced in the interplay between the headline of a story and the actual content. If one were to wonder whether information from an article in *The Onion* were in fact true, it would stand to reason that the verdict would become clearer once one encounters the often blatantly absurd content of the news copy. There are several reasons why this is likely not the case. First, as Secor and Walsh (2004) argue

the absence of specific textual cues in a satirical work, the kind of cues that would remove ambiguity, often function to fool a reader into thinking such texts are "real". At the same time, to place those cues within a text would defeat the purpose of creating an ironic meaning in the first place. Recognizing a joke requires some element of a cognitive leap of faith and not everyone is willing or able to convert. Secor and Walsh explain that since individuals are not constantly looking to be fooled by ironic meanings, they often are fooled anyway. Second, individuals barely read the articles they post throughout their social networks anyway. A report in the online newsmagazine *Slate* suggests a majority of Internet users will read at best half of an online news article, with many opting to share a link to the article throughout their social media networks well before that limit (Manjoo, 2013). That is, in general individuals may be more likely to repost an article the less they've read. Since *The Onion*'s operates almost entirely in an online format this creates a situation where mental shortcuts are used to interpret a rather complex web of ironic meanings and the increased likelihood that those interpretations will be passed on throughout the Web. In the next section I provide an analysis of such a phenomenon.

LITERALLY UNBELIEVABLE AS AN IRONIC REMEDIATED TEXT

There are more than 250 pages of posts on the site *Literally Unbelievable*. Each page contains roughly 10 posts from actual Facebook users, resulting in more than 25,000 total examples of individuals posting articles from *The Onion* as if they are legitimate news stories. Each of the posts has removed the full name and profile picture of every

commenter for the purposes of anonymity. This allows the focus to remain on the actual discourses rather than the individuals making the statements. Obviously analyzing each post is well beyond a reasonable scope of this dissertation. Instead I chose to focus on the "Top Posts" section, a collection of the most widely shared and liked examples on the site. This page contains a more manageable 21 pages of text, with 10 posts again per page. This yielded 210 posts on a wide variety of *The Onion* articles. The posts range from *Literally Unbelievable*'s inception in May of 2011 through June of 2014. In total 138 individual articles from *The Onion* were included in this section, many of them appearing multiple times. After carefully surveying each of these posts I conducted a close reading of 10 individual articles, including instances where they were posted multiple times. Each of the headlines is listed as subheadings below. An example screenshot of each article is included in the Appendix.

Many of the articles included involve topics political in nature, meaning that they tend to focus on elected representatives, candidates, and political campaigns. While not the only topics discussed on *The Onion* (or analyzed in this chapter), they are indicative of the types of topics most likely to be misinterpreted. There are two possible reasons for this occurrence. First, the timeframe of this website coincides with the 2012 US Presidential Election, with *The Onion* increasingly turning its focus toward that event in its overall coverage. These stories are likely to be more prevalent during that time. Second, as mentioned earlier much of the scholarly attention paid to *The Onion* has focused on its role in countering prevailing narratives that had such a profound impact on the American political climate since 9/11. Given empirical evidence that suggests

individuals of all political positions tend to think that mass media systems as a whole are biased against their worldview (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010) stories that satirize increases in partisan anxieties toward news outlets are likely to resonate with a wider audience. One interesting observation throughout many of these posts, whether or not the articles focus on politics, is how often individual comments immediately reveal partisan interpretations of the story. As this analysis indicates even the most absurd or silly headlines are often interpreted as overtly political.

The focus of the analysis is on how the humor of the articles is revealed through an ironic remediation. That is, each post is intended to function as a joke for the reader of the site, with irony and remediation being the mechanisms for humor. The analysis here is primarily concerned with how irony and remediation are strategies used to uncover how this specific text operates rhetorically. As outlined in the methods chapter, the main focus for the critic interested in illustrating an ironic remediation of new media texts is to focus on the dialectic tensions between audiences while also considering how the process of remediation (the presence of one medium within another) contributes to the ironic meaning of a text. The critic can further note which logic of remediation (hypermediacy or immediacy) is more prevalent within the text in order to highlight how that logic influences rhetorical action. In the analysis below I argue that hypermediacy is most prevalent in *Literally Unbelievable* because the posts reveal multiple ironic meanings through the "windowed style" of online discourse (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). I turn now to the remediated ironic posts of *Literally Unbelievable*.

Planned Parenthood Opens $8 Billion Abortionplex[14]

This article appears the most often throughout *Literally Unbelievable*, appearing six separate times throughout the "Top Posts" section, and mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. The headline of this article aims at satirizing a common concern, especially in conservative political discourse, that the non-profit reproductive health organization *Planned Parenthood* is overwhelmingly focused on increasing the rate of abortions in the United States (see "Planned Parenthood," 2011). While those concerns are greatly exaggerated the organization has become severely politicized, especially since *Planned Parenthood* relies in part on federal and state funding in order to operate. This politicization is readily apparent as this article is remediated through Facebook and then into *Literally Unbelievable*. Consider the aforementioned example of Louisiana Congressman John Fleming, whose initial Facebook post linking to this article is featured on the site (see Appendix). Posting the link while adding the comment "More on Planned Parenthood, abortion by the wholesale" indicates the story has been interpreted as literal.

The irony of the post is revealed in the comments on the congressman's Facebook page. The screenshot (indicating that this post itself has been remediated through Tumblr for audiences to view in an updated light) shows two comments under the link.[15] The first commenter (whose name and picture have been blurred for anonymity) responds, "The Onion is satire. How exactly did you get elected?" The second comment, from a different individual, states, "Sounds like more sensationalism to me. Get real." If irony is

[14]Original article can be found at http://www.theonion.com/articles/planned-parenthood-opens-8-billion-abortionplex,20476/

[15] See Appendix for screenshot of the example.

understood as dialectic then the meaning of this post, for readers of *Literally Unbelievable*, is created through the comments. The initial comment from Fleming, that this article reveals a disturbing development from a sinister organization, is reinterpreted by comments that either point out his own stupidity or simply deny that the story is genuine. The humor is revealed through this interplay. Furthermore, the humorous meaning of the post on *Literally Unbelievable* is influenced by the remediation of a satirical news website through a personal Facebook page. The ironic meaning is created through the action of posting an article, with brief commentary, and then inviting others to respond. Readers are then invited to share in observing this interaction, creating a multi-layered meaning of the initial article, as well as the creation of multiple targets of the joke. Hypermediacy is expressed as a multiplicity of media (Bolter & Grusin, 2000). The humor of this post derives from the presence of one medium in another.

In another example of this article an individual posts the link after seeing another person in their social network do the same. Evidence of this sharing throughout social networks is illustrated by the presence of the text "via" next to the user's name, indicating that the person is reposting this link originally posted by someone else in their feed. Now remediated onto their own Facebook page the post provides an additional, disturbing comment, to reinterpret the meaning of the article. Included above *The Onion* headline on the post is a comment claiming, "Muslims love this, kill all the cracker babies and they will kill the rest".[16] The irony in the post stems not from a humorous juxtaposition of meanings (as the statement is quite unfunny and offensive). Instead the immediate

[16] Example can be found at http://literallyunbelievable.org/tagged/popular/page/20

push to characterize this satirical article as part of a collaborative effort between Planned Parenthood and some ambiguous Islamic conspiracy to kill "cracker babies" signifies that the person does not recognize the article as fake. In providing a screenshot of this article remediated through Facebook readers of *Literally Unbelievable* are invited to share the in the creation of an updated meaning of the original article. In attempting to satirize a particular political discourse the remediated post is refashioned to further highlight the existence of the discourses it aims to critique. The resulting ironic humor stems from the presence of one medium (an article from *The Onion*) within another (an individual Facebook post).

Even when individuals are notified that the article is satirical they often hold to their initial judgment. One final example of this article illustrates this process. After again sharing the article from another person in their social network an individual includes the comment, "chilling to stare evil in the face."[17] Echoing a similar sentiment to the previous example, that there is a spiritual or religious evil at play in the creation of such a building, the post is followed up by comments from the person's social network drawing attention to the article's farcical nature. One commenter responds rather tongue-in-cheek with "awesome!" while another follows up with "I feel sorry for people who don't recognize when their leg is being pulled." The latter comment, an attempt to sarcastically notify the original person that the article is indeed not true is simultaneously acknowledged and dismissed by another. Writing in defense of the original post a fourth person comments, "While the article is obviously intended to be a joke, the killing of

[17] Example can be found at http://literallyunbelievable.org/tagged/popular/page/21

innocent babies is not a joke." What can be observed in this interaction is a shifting in interpretation over what exactly is the humorous target of the initial joke. What started as a headline satirizing the unfounded assumption that Planned Parenthood is massively increasing access to abortion services to individuals (a claim that is demonstrably false) has been adapted, remediated through the comments on a Facebook post, focusing now on how the mere existence of the organization is cause for alarm by many. The presence of the original ironic headline within this context serves to indicate its meaning has been remediated to address the comments on this post. In viewing the remediated article, viewers are invited to recognize an additional textual "wink," an updated meaning that would not have been observable otherwise. This observation is hypermediated, only possible through the recognition of multiple media operating simultaneously.

Brain-Dead Teen Only Capable Of Rolling Eyes And Texting To Be Euthanized[18]

This article appeared as frequently as the previous article, six times in total on the "Top Posts" page. The article, intended to satirize the angst and distancing behavior often attributed to teenagers in relation to their parents, takes this phenomenon to an extreme conclusion (see "Brain Dead Teen"). The text of the headline uses deliberately understated prose typical of *The Onion*'s style of humor (Warner, 2011). Though this headline refers to a video clip as opposed to a print article the same principles of irony and satire are still in place. Waisanen (2011) argues *The Onion*'s push to expand its online presence necessitated a renewed focus on video. Refashioning the style of print

[18] Original video found at http://www.theonion.com/video/braindead-teen-only-capable-of-rolling-eyes-and-te,27225/

journalism to address developments in cable news and online formats, these video clips serve as an example of how *The Onion*'s satire has been remediated to address contemporary media practices. This style is largely what allows *The Onion*'s satire of the contemporary mass mediated journalism to be so poignant. It also provides the possibility for unintended interpretations.

The very first of the "Top Posts" is actually an example of this article. Submitted by a user without any additional commentary this post contains six comments.[19] As one peruses the comments a reinterpretation of the article unfolds. The first comment contains explicit anger, exclaiming, "Fuck the hell off! I could have adopted her and know plenty of people who would also. Unless it was her choice, I would sue the doctor and put him out of business." This comment provides the first indication that the humor may have fallen on deaf ears, as it is not clear if the person posting the article knew it was satirical or not (they do not comment anywhere on the thread). This is immediately followed up by someone wondering, "Is this real or a joke?" reflecting a sense of ambiguity and indicating the possibility that the teenager in question was not in fact euthanized. The first commenter responds definitively to this second comment, "It ain't funny cause now there are people probably aiming guys (guns?)[20] at the doctor for ending her life and others who want to put the parents to justice and end their life as well." In expressing concern that an angry mob is going to attack both the (nonexistent) doctors and parents for allowing for such an atrocity, this comment reinterprets the meaning of

[19] See Appendix for screenshot of example.
[20] After careful examination I assume this is what this person was trying to type, misspelling "guns" as "guys".

the article. At least for the time being it is most certainly not a joke, except for those reading this exchange on *Literally Unbelievable*.

What is especially interesting about this exchange is that neither commenter seeks to find supporting information to confirm these events as true. Instead the previous commenter posts another link, this time to the homepage of *The Onion*, while adding, "Of course theonion.com is just a fairy tale about fiction articles for all I know. Need more sources." This comment similarly addresses the possible dubious nature of the article while also noting that more research should be done to verify the story's validity. That this person did not just do that first adds another layer of irony to the post, further reinterpreting the joke for viewers of the entire exchange. Another commenter follows up with a simple question that goes unheeded by the rest of the thread, "how can she be brain dead if she can think and text" providing an obvious question that would indicate the article is satirical. Yet since individuals are not usually looking for textual cues to indicate that they've been fooled (Secor & Walsh, 2004), this comment likely goes unnoticed. The most intriguing, and arguably most humorous, part of the entire exchange is found in the final comment on the thread. A third individual, perhaps recognizing what viewers of this site have known all along, bluntly posts the link to *Literally Unbelievable* itself with the simple comment, "http://literallyunbelievable.org/." Acting as a virtual punch line viewers can recognize the hypermediated presence of a website remediated through itself in order to create a multilayered ironic meaning.

In another transaction the link to the article is accompanied with the initial comment "This is such a tragedy. Please pray for this girl."[21] After a series of comments from others expressing outrage over this young girl's demise a follow up comment asks, "Why isn't the media covering this?" This appears to be a common refrain throughout *Literally Unbelievable* yet no one seems to be able to provide an answer. Anxieties over perceived media bias or lack of substantive and objective coverage are reflected in the responses to the article, while at the same time individuals are unable to follow up to determine the article's legitimacy. When these articles are remediated through Facebook by a person who does not share (or recognize) the ironic wink, the initial intended irony is remediated as well, this time between the curator of *Literally Unbelievable* and its readers.

Obama's 19Year-Old Son Makes Rare Appearance At DNC[22]

The initial humor in this article stems from persistent anxieties regarding President Barack Obama's personal history (see "Obama's 19Year-Old Son," 2012). This is perhaps most illustrated by demands for the president to reveal his authentic birth certificate, particularly in the aftermath of his first election, along with numerous attempts to discredit the legitimacy of any and all documentation no matter how extensive.

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[21] Example can be found at http://literallyunbelievable.org/tagged/popular/page/15

[22] Original article found at http://www.theonion.com/articles/obamas-19yearold-son-makes-rare-appearance-at-dnc,29458/

Another feature of this article is how quickly individuals cited religious anxieties over (factually incorrect) assertions that the President of the United States is a member of the Islamic faith. Given the staying power of the narrative that Barack Obama is hiding something, feeding in to broader yet implied concerns that he is "not like us," this article figured prominently in many of the exchanges on *Literally Unbelievable*. Furthermore, individuals were prompted to add their own conspiracy theories as explanations for how such a story could be hidden until now.

These anxieties are expressed in the following example. Posted in early October 2012, less than a month from the presidential election, an individual identified only as "M" posted this link to their Facebook page adding the comment:

> What will we really find out about him in the long run. The Onion is a liberal blog that got this incredible story out recently. This is another example of the liberal press failing to vet Obama back in 2007-2008. Now they are trying to soften the shock. He hides everything, what's next?[23]

Remediated from the original site through Facebook, the comment ironically remediates the target of the headline, that Obama has more skeletons in his closet. That the article is cited as proof of existence of the very discourse it satirizes enables the reader to share in the ironic wink. This wink is further enabled by the logic of hypermediacy, in that it requires acknowledging the act of mediation in order to refashion satirical discourse as actual news.

[23] See Appendix for screenshot of example.

As stated earlier religious anxieties regarding Barack Obama's past are often revealed as this article is remediated through Facebook. As Jacobson (2010) asserts religious views are often synonymous with political views when encountering ambiguous or contradictory information. This is certainly the case with this article. In another example the article is posted with the initial comment "POOR KID…!!!"[24] After a series of comments asking if the article is real and speculation that it is likely some sort of ploy to confuse voters a final comment declares "I'm praying the lord is talking, are you listening, matthew 7:15 follow the LORD /Romney Ryan 2012." The verse is a reference to the biblical book of Matthew where Christians are warned to beware of false prophets. When taken in the context of the exchange it can be understood as an indictment of Obama, with the revelation of a hidden son given as evidence. The last part of the comment provides an illustration of the types of religious/political justifications identified by Jacobson, provided in the context of how individuals actually encounter conflicting information. By remediating the exchange through another medium *Literally Unbelievable* invites readers to recognize the humor of the situation, created through the creation of an ironic double meaning where ironic commentary on an element of public discourse is used to then confirm the existence of that very same discourse.

Perceptions of media bias are further revealed through attempts by some to call into question the article's legitimacy. In one exchange an individual posts the article while adding "I was going to vote for Obama but I think the fact he had a son out of

[24] Example can be found at http://literallyunbelievable.org/tagged/popular/page/8

wedlock means he can't say anything about morals anymore!!!!!"[25] The next two comments express skepticism towards the legitimacy of the article, stating, "Uh, I don't think this is real. Obama doesn't even have a son," along with, "does seem like something we would have heard about by now." At this point the exchange displays calls for a measured response on the grounds that the information is very likely not true. However, the final comment reinterprets the entire post, with the person who originally posted the article exclaiming, "of course you liberals would deny it just like hes muslim and not an American citizen!! Pretty sad when Obama BASTERD son has to look up his moms boyfriend for a male role model when his OWN DAD is the president." The significance of this comment is twofold: First, it indicates that the person very likely read the rest of the article, something that does not often happen with Internet sources (Manjoo, 2013). Second, the move to quickly chastise the earlier comments as blinded by partisanship and ignorant of the President's (again unfounded) religious ties, works to refashion those comments, along with the article itself, in a new context. The interplay of media forms, accompanied by the back-and-forth between commenters, creates an internal context where each of the comments in the thread contributes to the double meaning created through irony.

[25] Example can be found at http://literallyunbelievable.org/tagged/popular/page/9

Paul Ryan Knocks Change Cup Out of Homeless Ohio Veteran's Hands[26]

The significance of this headline lies in how the reactions differed as compared to examples involving Barack Obama. Wisconsin Congressman Paul Ryan, the Republican Vice-Presidential nominee in 2012, is depicted in a photo angrily knocking a plastic cup out of the hands of a man appearing to be homeless (see "Paul Ryan"). Unlike the previous examples involving outrage over a story believed to be true, the comments regarding this video almost immediately question its legitimacy, with one important caveat. They almost entirely come to Congressman Ryan's defense at the expense of the "veteran" in the article. In one exchange an individual comments, "You sure he's a vet?...Many are not vets but say they are for money. And many that say they are homeless are not."[27] An ironic double meaning is created between the initial humorous target of the article (Paul Ryan harbors a disdain for homeless people, even if they are veterans) and the reaction by commenters who think the article is a fake (the person is neither a veteran nor homeless). In "refuting" the accuracy of the information in the article the comment misnames the situation (Burke, 1984a) unintentionally revealing what has been true all along, that the article is not real. But in observing this interaction on *Literally Unbelievable* readers are prompted to recognize the ironic agreement over the video's falsity. Readers of the site, like the commenter on the link, come to the same conclusion but for completely different reasons.

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[26] Original video found at http://www.theonion.com/video/paul-ryan-spending-final-day-of-campaign-reminding,30256/ (Under the headline "Paul Ryan Spending Final Day of Campaign Reminding Homeless People They Did This to Themselves"). The headline above refers to the one provided in the description of the video.

[27] See appendix for screenshot of example.

The exchange further reveals that the underlying reasoning for the story's inaccuracy is that the homeless person's motives are dishonest, reflecting a similar sentiment alluded to by *The Onion*. That is, the comment provides an example of the very discourse *The Onion* seeks to satirize, doing so unintentionally. Readers of this exchange are then prompted to recognize and share in this textual wink. This disdain is additionally supported by a follow up comment from the same person stating, "And if his cup dropped, it's not a big deal. Just pick it back up." Implying that a perceived aggression from a Vice-Presidential candidate is not a cause for concern, likely because the aggression is directed at someone who probably deserves scorn anyway, further indicates that the commenter reflects the same ideological position *The Onion* attributes to Paul Ryan. Through the process of remediation a fake article serves to illustrate a very real belief regarding treatment of the homeless.

Additional attempts to defend Ryan's actions in the video illustrate the remediation process more explicitly. In another example the comments focused entirely on the quality of the photo included with the link. One commenter decided to provide a rather elaborate criticism of the photo, writing,

> being a photoshop expert in layering, I should question the authenticity of the pic. Some observations: Notice that Ryan's image is sharper that than the homeless guy while if you can notice the objects in the background

> gets to be more out of focus as compared to the homeless man the farther it is from the 'lens' if actual lenses were used.[28]

Obviously, the photo is digitally altered since the article itself is not real. Paul Ryan did not actually attack a homeless veteran. However, unlike the previous example the skepticism over the accuracy of the report stems from a mediation perspective rather than a partisan one. A follow up comment from the same person continues, "Also, lighting dictate that shadows all fall parallel to the light casting it-in this case the shadow of Ryan projecting his leg should not be pointing horizontally." While technically accurate, the comments miss the point that the image has been deliberately altered in order to provide a punch line to a joke. What these comments illustrate is the presence of hypermediacy. Hypermediacy involves the recognition of the medium in which the text operates, the counter point to the effacement of mediation offered by immediacy. Part of the humor of the example is that the image is so crudely altered that it could not possibly be a legitimate photo. However, when placed in the context of these comments the photo becomes part of an ironic meaning. Readers of the exchange know the image has been altered, as does the person making the comment, but not because of the lack of technical proficiency on the part of *The Onion*.

As stated earlier in this example, what makes this link different from the previous ones involves the ways in which individuals were quick to question its legitimacy. Whether it was calling in to question the credibility of a homeless person or the quality of a digitally altered photograph, this article was almost immediately discounted as a fake.

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[28] Example can be found at http://literallyunbelievable.org/tagged/popular/page/6

This is in stark contrast to the reactions and comments levied at articles involving President Barack Obama. Attempts to call out shoddy photo editing were never made in reference to the President's alleged illegitimate son (or in any other article involving an ironic criticism of Obama found on *Literally Unbelievable*). In his study of partisan polarization and the psychological process of rationalization Jacobson (2010) argued, "the more strongly held the prior attitude, the more it will be defended by one or more of these psychological devices" (p. 35). Given a strong partisan filter, he suggests individuals will go to great lengths to mentally justify their interpretation of a news article. That Paul Ryan's "attitude" toward a homeless man was so elaborately rationalized suggests further support for Jacobson's claim. Furthermore, as LaMarre et al. (2009) argue since "satire is often ambiguous, biased information processing models provide an excellent framework for understanding how audiences see what they want to see" (p. 213). The ironic remediation of these examples provides a compelling rhetorical illustration of this phenomenon.

Interestingly enough the texts of *Literally Unbelievable* partially mimic the study carried out by Nyhan and Reifler (2010) about political misperceptions. Focusing on examining situations where individual are deliberately misinformed on a topic and then provided with correcting information the researchers sought to create a series of mock news articles. They explain, "in order to maximize realism, we constructed the mock news articles using text from actual articles whenever possible" (310). As Warner (2011), and Waisanen (2011) explain, the generic features of *The Onion* follow a similar format. The humor stems from the use of actual journalistic conventions that are "for the

most part relentlessly true to the media forms they parody" (Waisanen, 2011, p. 509). The absurd and often hyperbolic content is then juxtaposed against these conventions (Achter, 2008). These articles then operate in a manner similar to those created by Nyhan and Reifler for their study with one important distinction. *Literally Unbelievable* demonstrates how these articles are actually embedded in a mediated discursive space, in this case Facebook. The disconnect between individuals who get the irony as initially intended and those who miss the ironic cues and perceive the articles as real complements Nyhan and Reifler's claim that "partisans and ideologues tend to view identical content as biased against them" (2010, p. 315). The differences in reactions to articles satirizing media narratives about Obama and those regarding his Republican challengers in the 2012 presidential election also rhetorically illustrate a finding from Nyhan and Reifler suggesting "perceptions of liberal media bias are especially widespread in the U.S. among Republicans" (p. 315). The reactions and comments to these last two examples certainly find a similar traction to these claims. The next example aims to make these perceptions an explicit part of the joke.

Media Having Trouble Finding Right Angle On Obama's Double-Homicide[29]

This article attempts to satirize the heavily reliance mainstream media outlets place on political gamesmanship in news coverage (see "Media Having Trouble," 2009). A common complaint from journalism and media scholars is that contemporary mass mediated journalism places too high an emphasis on casting current events in terms of a

[29] Original article found at http://www.theonion.com/articles/media-having-trouble-finding-right-angle-on-obamas,2703/

struggle between Republicans and Democrats (Merritt, 1998; Rosen, 1999; Faina, 2012a). Using deliberately understated prose this article takes that emphasis to a purposeful extreme.[30]

The focus on the media's "angle" also provides the basis for many of the comments. One exchange in particular illustrates this focus. After posting the link and following up with the comment "what ever happened with this story….", one individual proceeds to argue that media bias is to blame for the lack of information regarding the committing of a double murder by the President of the United States.[31] When another commenter wonders "how credible this site is, seems kind of extreme even for ovomit. Couldn't really find the actual story," they are met with a quick response two minutes later suggesting, "the media buried it is why you can't find it…"[32] Throughout *Literally Unbelievable* charges of media bias are repeatedly levied toward articles satirizing vitriolic discourses involving President Obama. On some level this makes sense given evidence suggesting charges of media bias tend to flow in one direction. Nyhan and Reifler (2010) remind that while evidence of perceived bias occurs across all political identifications these perceptions occur more often among conservatives. The final comment in this thread serves to solidify the contradictory discourses involving media bias. The same person who claimed, "the media buried it is why you can't find it" also suggests "I am hoping some one knows more on this…I put it out there for people to

[30] If it were an actual news story the headline likely would have read "Obama Murders Two People"
[31] See Appendix for screenshot of example.
[32] "ovomit" is a crude and derisive play on the name "Obama." This seemed like a necessary clarification to make here.

research it." Simultaneously claiming that the article is both evidence that the President is a murderer and evidence that the entire story has been covered up creates an irresolvable ironic tension that serves to reinterpret the headline. From a remediation standpoint this exchange highlights a contradictory impulse toward evaluating information in an age of new media. All information is hypermediated, heavily dependent on medium in which it is presented. Yet when confronted with the challenge of finding further information to support this source, this "evidence" instead becomes the evidence of suppression. Arguing that "the media buried it" rhetorically denies the existence of the media that was used to make that claim. In denying this act of mediation, the comments signal a shift from hypermediacy to immediacy. This example, then, provides an illustration the interplay of the mutually contradictory logics of hypermediacy and immediacy in influencing public discourse online. These mutually influential logics become key to illustrating the ironic wink evident in the reactions to the article.

Traditional partisanship cues are at play in this example as well. One post contains a passionate call to action for individuals to spread the word on Barack Obama's murderous tendencies,

> Everyone on Facebook needs to read this and forward to everyone they know. This is just another way he is using his power to murder people as a thug. Wake up do you really want this as a President.[33]

[33] Example can be found at http://literallyunbelievable.org/tagged/popular/page/8

The answer is, of course, no. But in calling upon others in one's social network to share the article in order to ostensibly spread awareness that only this article seems to be able to provide again highlights how "beliefs about controversial factual questions in politics are often closely linked with one's ideological preferences or partisan beliefs" (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010, p. 307). The difference lies in the strategy in which individuals confirm their (misinformed) beliefs. In the act of "forwarding to everyone they know" individuals enact the logic of hypermediacy while ironically denying that logic in claiming there is no media coverage of the story they found through the media. While complex, it provides a strong illustration of how an ironic meaning of *The Onion* can be reinterpreted through the process of remediation.

Did You Know: Mitt Romney Played Roseanne's Boss For Half A Season On The Hit Sitcom 'Roseanne'?[34]

If the last example serves to illustrate how discourses of perceived media bias are revealed through ironic remediation this next example illustrates how they play out in the conflation of electoral politics and entertainment (see "Onion Voters Guide"). Similar to the "Brain Dead Teen" example, this headline refers to a video clip rather than a print article while adhering to the same principles of irony and satire (Waisanen, 2011). As previously mentioned there is a stark difference between how individuals react to a satirical story involving President Obama and how individuals react to satirical stories from those politically opposite. Mitt Romney is a prime example. Throughout *Literally*

[34] Original video found at http://www.theonion.com/video/the-onion-voters-guide-to-mitt-romney,29764/

Unbelievable commenters tended to be more willing to interpret the legitimacy of an article depending on their partisan beliefs, with a clear skew toward conservative political ideologies. The uniqueness of this example lies in its deliberate focus on electoral politics and popular culture. Jeffrey Jones (2009) argues that politics has become increasingly intertwined with popular culture in an effort to pique interest in the political process. This development is aided and abetted by media outlets similarly interested in reaching viewers. Jones continues there is a long tradition of mass mediated American politics cross-pollinating with entertainment outlets, especially in efforts to create stronger emotional associations with candidates. Several scholars have noted this trend coincided with the widespread adoption of the television and continued through the proliferation of the Internet (Mindich, 2005; Baym, 2008; Baym, 2009; Jones, 2008; Marc, 2008; Kuipers, 2011).

The humor in this example stems from these developments as well. Appearing as part of *The Onion*'s "Voter's Guide" during the 2012 Presidential election, the headline and resulting video clip satirize attempts to make candidates more endearing to voters. In the case of Mitt Romney, who is often characterized as stiff and personally dull, the video claims he spent time as a cast member on one of the highest rated and most beloved television sitcoms of all time. The link includes an image of Romney crudely edited into a scene with Roseanne. Though the image is poorly edited, the comments provided do not focus on the shoddy image like they did with the Paul Ryan example. Instead commenters claim to recall fondly watching Romney on the show. In one example an individual comments, "I totally remember that now that you jar my memory banks!!! I

KNEW I had seen him before some where other than just on the political scene."[35] This comment explicitly reveals an ironic double meaning to the reader. This individual did in fact know that Romney appeared on this sitcom. They just needed this video to remind them of something they already knew to be true.

This reaction was repeated several more times throughout *Literally Unbelievable*. In another example an individual reveals, "I saw that episode. He was so funny."[36] While their political ideology is not explicitly revealed, I argue that when understood in relation to popular discourses surrounding Romney's personality it is ironically revealed in their appraisal of Romney's acting skills. At the very least readers are invited to understand this comment as one coming from a strong Romney supporter, providing further weight to Nyhan and Reifler's (2010) claims that individuals will interpret potentially ambiguous information according to their political preferences. A person who is more likely to be supportive of the former Republican Presidential nominee is thus considered more likely to claim they have seen that nominee in this context. What they are less likely to do is to comment on the poor quality of the image, a missed cue that further reveals the ironic reinterpretation of the post.

In one final example a person claims to have personally confirmed the legitimacy of the story. After posting the link and responding to a comment asking "Is that really true?" one individual responds, "Yes. I didn't post it until it was confirmed by my sister

[35] See Appendix for screenshot of example.
[36] Example can be found at http://literallyunbelievable.org/tagged/popular/page/7

who has seen every episode on dvd."[37] In claiming to have fact checked something that cannot be verified the comment serves to indicate that individuals tend to "see what they want to see" (LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009, p. 213). It also adds to the ironic reinterpretation of the post. The humor of the example now becomes targeted at the lengths individuals will go to justify a narrative that confirms their partisan preferences. At the same time the attribution of irony places readers of *Literally Unbelievable* in a position of superiority. Whether or not the person actually consulted with their family member is irrelevant. In this context the exchange contributes to an ironic meaning where information is confirmed as true regardless of its accuracy. The purpose of this effort to confirm the accuracy of the information is revealed in the final comment. The same person who initially asked if the story was true responds, "Wow! I guess he isn't an old stodgy stuffed shirt." The double meaning is explicitly revealed in this comment. A headline satirizing attempts by the Romney campaign to dispel widely held opinions on his lack of charisma becomes an ironic confirmation of that trope. The remediation of this link rhetorically induces the creation of this double meaning.

***Phelps Drowns*[38]**

It is worth noting that some articles fostered reactions of shock or confusion more than outrage or praise. Consider this headline involving US Olympic Gold Medal Swimmer Michael Phelps. The two-word headline is decidedly understated, keeping with the overall style of *The Onion*. The humor of the headline is fairly straightforward,

[37] Example can be found at http://literallyunbelievable.org/tagged/popular/page/7
[38] Original article found at http://www.theonion.com/articles/phelps-drowns,29059/

creating an ironic juxtaposition where the most accomplished competitive swimmer in Olympic history drowns in the middle of a race (see "Phelps Drowns," 2012).

As this article is remediated the responses are varied. The most interesting response occurred when an individual calls out *The Onion* for poor taste in humor, mistakenly assuming Phelps had in fact died. Posting the link with the accompanying comment "Poor taste by The Onion. It's too soon to be making fun of Michael Phelps' death" one individual makes the case that perhaps *The Onion* has overstepped its bounds.[39] A follow up comment agrees adding, "yeah I thought it was poor form." Much like the article alleging an Obama double homicide, the irony of the exchange revolves around the source itself. The remediation of the article reveals an ironic tension between a joke poking fun at the idea that the world's greatest swimmer would drown in a pool and those who think the joke is making light of said swimmer's actual death. In order to recognize the tension readers of *Literally Unbelievable* would need to have some level of shared knowledge with the individuals posting the article. One needs to know whom Michael Phelps is and what he has accomplished in order to recognize the irony of the post. If one recognizes both elements the exchange creates a situation where readers are invited to recognize the humorous juxtaposition of someone citing an article from *The Onion* to criticize *The Onion* for being too quick to poke fun at something entirely fabricated by *The Onion*. Since this is the only source where such news was "reported" it remains unclear as to how exactly this information could have been obtained otherwise, or what exactly is supposed to be the joke. In the context of the exchange it does appear

[39] See Appendix for screenshot of example.

as though both individuals realize the satirical nature of *The Onion*. This confusion highlights another instance where the logic of hypermediacy shifts to the logic of immediacy as readers are tasked with pondering how this cue could have been missed. Posting the link to an article asserting a fake story (enacting a logic of hypermediacy) in order to criticize that article for inappropriate humor works to efface that same source. Like the example of the Obama Double Homicide both logics work simultaneously, in an ironic pairing, contributing toward a refashioning of the original joke.

New Study Finds 85% Of Americans Don't Know All The Dance Moves To National Anthem[40]

The humor in this article is not specifically tied to satirizing a current political situation. Like the article involving the possible euthanized teenager the context of the article is a bit more ambiguous. Unlike that previous article this one is much more silly in demeanor. Not knowing apparent dance moves associated with the national anthem becomes associated with a lack of general civics knowledge. The humor of the article aims to play with discourses suggesting US Americans are ignorant of their cultural heritage (see "New Study Finds," 2012). Though deliberately attempting to make the example as silly as possible, claiming there is official choreography associated with the national anthem, several responses still revealed a sense of repulsion. Two examples in particular featured comments largely expressing dismay toward a loss of national pride. In the first example, an individual posts the link while adding, "What a shame we are

[40] Original article found at http://www.theonion.com/articles/new-study-finds-85-of-americans-dont-know-all-the,28697/

losing our history…"[41] The irony in the post is readily apparent from the outset. The reader is drawn toward a comment lamenting a loss of history and the immediately confronted with the headline, refashioning the comment as now as an unintentionally humorous addition to the story. Additional commentary further expands on the refashioning of the headline. One comment posted immediately below the link exclaimed, "Get out of here, this is some kind of Joke! I don't ever remember learning 'dance Moves' to the SSB? The only people I have ever seen 'dancing' to the SSB were cheerleaders, and by listening t the description of the writer, that's what it sounds like." In calling in to question the legitimacy of the article this comment serves to refashion the meaning of both the article and the initial comment provided by the poster. A satirical take on a common trope in American public discourse (we are losing our cultural heritage as a nation) ends up sparking strong reactions both affirming and negating that claim. Readers are invited to recognize the presence of both claims simultaneously, operating in relation to the prominently displayed headline on the screen. The ironic reinterpretation of the article is further revealed when the previous commenter continues, "the only move that I know of that you are suppose to do is stand, remove your hat and place your right hand over your heart?" This addition provides an intriguing reinterpretation of the original joke. On the one hand the article provides a blatantly absurd claim regarding the national anthem that either serves to confirm a belief in a loss of cultural heritage or disbelief over the accuracy of the source. On the other hand the article could also be read as providing a tongue in cheek reference to the physical gestures associated with showing

[41] See Appendix for screenshot of example.

reverence during the singing of the national anthem (the so-called "dance moves"). These comments suggest there are multiple discourses satirized by *The Onion* in the article. In this exchange no less than three reactions can be recognized as operating simultaneously.

Another example illustrated a more explicitly political reaction. This time appearing without an accompanying comment from the poster the responses immediately characterized as evidence of a clear moral failing of the American people. The first comment responds simply, "No way!!! That's a national embarrassment!!!"[42] A sense of disbelief and shame are expressed simultaneously as one reads this comment in relation to the headline. A second comment is more illustrative of the types of politically motivated sense making alluded to throughout this chapter. In this comment an individual responds,

> It is disgraceful! Everyone wants to be 'protected' and to receive hand-outs, yet they have no love or appreciation for our country and feel no responsibility as citizens. The world has gone nuts. I just cannot understand it; we have become a nation of welfare mentality.

The logic of the comment is somewhat hard to follow. Responding to the article with a charge that this only further intensifies the evil of the welfare state can be seen as aligning with Nyhan and Reifler's (2010) argument that individuals often use politically driven heuristics when responding to ambiguous information. At the same time the reader can sense intensity in the statement that suggests a strong conviction in these thoughts, even if the reasoning is unclear. Given Nyhan and Reifler' findings that "the

[42] Example can be found at http://literallyunbelievable.org/tagged/popular/page/12

least informed people expressed the highest confidence in their answers" (p. 305) when encountering ambiguous or contradictory information, perhaps this reaction is to be expected. There is an ironic double meaning to discourses surrounding political knowledge in this exchange. The dialectic between viewing an article as an ironic commentary on lack of political knowledge regarding a basic civic practice and viewing the article as an indictment of moral decay brought on by the welfare state (that in itself expresses a lack of basic civic knowledge) enables readers to identify perhaps an even deeper meaning to the original article. The exchange occurs, and the double meaning is created, via the process of remediation.

Others expressed wonder or amazement at the news. One individual shared the link after seeing someone in their network post the same, serving to remediate the same article throughout their social network, adding the comment, "I never knew! Thanks for sharing!"[43] Rather than responding in disgust that so many American citizens do not know basic cultural customs, the comments largely expressed surprise and excitement. One person commented, "Well, I never knew either! Love it! Think we should learn it, begin it again and hopefully everyone else will join us! Thanks for sharing!" Drawing attention to recouping a long lost tradition now becomes the focus of the article. While other comments wonder why, "this is a tradition that has been overlooked" the comments do not use this "fact" as a basis for making an overtly politicized argument about social welfare services. Instead this exchange communicates a sense of excitement over a rediscovered tradition that these individuals can now share with others. In yet another

[43] Example can be found at http://literallyunbelievable.org/tagged/popular/page/12

example this same mentality is expressed when one commenter expresses, "I may practice them today before I go to a 4th party later this evening."[44] That this article served as the basis for both lack of patriotism and heightened patriotism is an indication that the headline is perhaps more ambiguous than others. If the ironist is to construct an ironic statement with an implied edge in mind (Hutcheon, 1994) and if satire is humor's "most overtly political genre" (Gray et. al, 2008, p. 11) the responses to this article would seem to indicate a bit more ambiguity in how the hidden meaning of the headline is to be understood. In other words, as the article was remediated the varied responses indicate that the underlying discursive target of the humor is hard to pinpoint.

Scientists Trace Heat Wave To Massive Star At Center of Solar System[45]

This article was one of the few to weigh in on discourses surrounding science, particularly the science of climate change (see "Scientists Trace Heat Wave," 2011). Like the previous example, reactions ranged from wonder to outrage. This is likely due to the ironic double meaning embedded in the headline, where "massive star" can be understood as synonymous with "sun". As with all ironic exchanges the reader must be in some level of sympathy with the rhetor in order to recognize the double meaning. I turn first to discourses expressing wonder.

In one example the article is posted with the initial comment stating simply, "Wow."[46] After expressing a sense of wonder at what is interpreted as a major cosmic

[44] Example can be found at http://literallyunbelievable.org/tagged/popular/page/12
[45] Original article found at http://www.theonion.com/articles/scientists-trace-heat-wave-to-massive-star-at-cent,21088/

discovery the post continues, "I though there were two suns in that fire picture I took! Awesome—no mention, tho, if it was a brown dwarf!" Engaging in a bit of scientific speculation, this post indicates that some independent research has been conducted to confirm the results outlined by *The Onion*. What is interesting about this example on the site is a follow up from the same person is included in the example. Immediately under this post is another one from the same person, this time with a photo posted from the individual's own records. Posting an image from their own photo library that looks similar to the one included in *The Onion* headline, with the comment "Here it is again," this second post serves to ironically reinterpret the first. This "verification" is followed up by several comments from others expressing a sense of amazement. One person responds, "oh my goodness that is crazy," only to follow up with, "that is insane. It's like something out of star wars." These comments work to create an additional layer of meaning to *The Onion* article, with the meaning of the original headline refashioned in relation to this newer context of a Facebook post. The original poster next suggests that others, "really should look at some of the links on my page TODAY. There's some really interesting stuff happening." This comment further suggests the article served as a starting point for extra verification of what readers have already been invited to recognize ironically, that these are all just pictures of the sun. This ironic meaning is further solidified by the final comment in the thread, where the person expressing amazement concludes, "wow, a massive star in our solar system. This is literally insane." When interpreted in the context of the exchange, and on a site named *Literally Unbelievable*,

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[46] See Appendix for screenshot of example.

this final comment is especially striking. The back and forth between the text and audience key to the creation of an ironic bond is completed. In being able to recognize the presence of these simultaneous yet contradictory discourses the post works ironically.

In one context the article serves as an ironic satire of discourses involving the wonders of outer space. In another context the same article is used to engender skepticism over scientific research. This skepticism is often accompanied by discourses of religious paranoia. This is certainly the case in the next example. Included as of the "Top Ten Facebook Reactions to The Onion of 2011" this article sparked a rather intense reaction with religious overtones. Operating through a back and forth exchange between two individuals the initial comment exclaims,

> You have got to be kidding! I watched "Curiosity" on Discovery last night, regarding Stephen Hawkings (sp?) theory of there being no Creator; followed it, disagreed. But now, knowing the "star" in the center of the galaxy is responsible for the sunburn on my but from falling asleep on a two-person floaty in the lazy river at the waterpark?! I don't know what to think anymore!!![47]

How this person understands exactly how a sunburn works is beside the point. Instead, when this comment is placed immediately over the intentionally ironic headline, readers are invited to recognize an extra ironic "wink" as the article is reinterpreted in relation to this statement. Another commenter adds to the fury, stating, "You know he's wrong! How did we get the right amount of gravity? And the exact right amount of oxygen? All

[47] Example can be found at http://literallyunbelievable.org/tagged/popular/page/16

the food we need is here and water. The vast abundance of diversity on this planet couldn't possibly happened without a creator". At this point the remediation of the article into this context reveals discourses invoking skepticism of science, particularly climate science, informed by a strong belief in Creationism. Additionally, readers can note the discussion has moved away from the article itself and instead to a discussion of the scientific research of renowned astrophysicist Stephen Hawking. At the same time, the headline and accompanying image remain present while readers observe the exchange.

As the discussion of the article continues the religious discourses become more heated (no pun intended). In one particularly troublesome comment Stephen Hawking's famous affliction with Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) is criticized, claiming, "I think he is bitter that his affliction hasn't been taken away by God. If I were him I'd be studying more bible than trying to disprove our creators existence." At this point the discussion has shifted from skepticism from the science of weather and sun damage to one of religious punishment. The discursive context of the discussion changes as each comment is added. What does not change is the presence of the article and accompanying image of the sun. The article and the comments almost seem to invoke completely different discourses. However, when focusing on how irony is created in the back and forth dialectic between rhetor and audience, the post indicates how the presence of contradictory yet mutually dependent discourses coexist simultaneously, with "all voices, or personalities, or positions, integrally affecting one another" (Burke, 1969a, p. 512).

Though the previous exchange can be understood as illustrating a religious-conservative discourse, reactions to this article revealed oppositional political discourses as well, and to similar extremes. In a third example of this post one person responds to the article with a politically left-leaning ad hominem attack. While one commenter responds, "Really??? Holy shit!!" to the headline, invoking a similar discourse of disbelief found throughout the site, a second comment invokes a purely political attack. Responding with a similar notion of disbelief this comment demands to know, "What loony teabagging conspiracy nut came up with this one?" This comment reveals a politically left-leaning perspective as illustrated by the phrase "teabagging conspiracy nut," a not so subtle reference to the libertarian/conservatively identified Tea Party political movement. Similar to the previous religious/conservative exchange, this comment expresses skepticism toward the "science" of a heat wave in almost purely political terms. When taken in context to the headline and image, which again are displayed prominently in the post, readers are invited to observe the presence of hyper political partisanship influencing the interpretation of satire. These interpretations are not tied to any specific political ideology, as evidenced in this most recent example, though they tend to often appear more prevalent among conservatives (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). Instead they serve as a rhetorical illustration of a major feature of mass mediated public discourse. In contemporary mass mediated public discourse, particularly in the Internet age, individuals are increasingly seeing what they wish to see in satirical messages (LaMarre et al., 2009). That it occurs in situations where such satire goes unrecognized provides further illustration of the prevalence of these discourses.

Hungover Energy Secretary Wakes Up Next To Solar Panel[48]

Thus far this analysis has focused on how irony and remediation can be used to illustrate how individuals interpret satirical discourse when it is not recognized as such. However, one final example illustrates that some individuals are in on the joke as well. For example former U.S. Energy Secretary Stephen Chu posted an article to his own Facebook page featuring the headline "Hungover Energy Secretary Wakes Up Next To Solar Panel." The link features a crudely altered digital photograph of Secretary Chu disheveled in bed next to a commercial solar panel (see "Hungover Energy Secretary," 2013). Chu's comment further indicates that he is in on the joke with *The Onion*, writing,

> I just want everyone to know that my decision not to serve a second term as Energy Secretary has absolutely nothing to do with the allegations made in this week's edition of the Onion. While I'm not going to confirm or deny the charges specifically, I will say that clean, renewable solar power is a growing source of U.S. jobs and is becoming more and more affordable, so it's no surprise that lots of Americans are falling in love with solar.[49]

As this final example illustrates the ironic remediation that occurs throughout *Literally Unbelievable* operates in multiple different ways. In this example, the former US Energy Secretary refashions the underlying premise of the satirical claim, that he is obsessed with solar energy almost to the point of becoming a sexual fetish, and turns it into one that

[48] Original article found at http://www.theonion.com/articles/hungover-energy-secretary-wakes-up-next-to-solar-p,31204/

[49] See Appendix for screenshot of example.

highlights the virtues of solar energy. The phrase "lots of Americans are falling in love with solar" becomes the textual wink indicating Chu is aware of the multiple levels to which the joke can operate. Though he recognizes the joke as such, Chu remediates the article by posting it to his own Facebook page with a statement that ironically responds to the charges made in the article. In this refashioned context the meaning of the post can be understood as, "US Energy Secretary Stephen Chu really *loves* solar power and you should too," with an understanding that "love" has multiple meanings. The hypermediated features of the text are highlighted in the joke, with irony being created precisely through the process of remediation. When understood in relation to the previous articles analyzed throughout this chapter, readers are invited to consider the many ways in which *The Onion* has been interpreted, and misinterpreted, as it is shared throughout social networks. There are several things to consider involving this strategy of revealing multiple contradictory discourses using irony and remediation. I will discuss several possible implications in the final section of this chapter.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I analyzed how irony and remediation operate rhetorically through an analysis of the website *Literally Unbelievable*. Through observing how individuals react to the linking of articles from satirical news site *The Onion*, I argued that these exchanges enact an ironic remediation that reveals multiple contradictory discourses common to mass mediated public discourse in an age of new media. The characteristics of these exchanges provide further support to empirical studies from political

communication scholars as to the cognitive psychological processes employed when individuals are confronted with information that does not confirm their perceived ideological worldview. There are several important considerations stemming from this analysis involving the variety of reactions, the similarities between satirical and non-satirical discourse, and exclusionary impulses inherent in the rhetoric of irony.

The first consideration involves the variety of reactions to the articles posted throughout *Literally Unbelievable*. The focus of the analysis was to illustrate how irony and remediation work rhetorically to reveal underlying discourses prevalent in new media. In that analysis I observed a wide range of reactions to satirical discourse not recognized as such. What these reactions all share in common is that each post includes the creation of a double meaning, necessary to irony, by highlighting the ways different media formats contribute to the creation of this meaning, necessary to remediation. Using this rhetorical strategy readers are invited to consider the ways these posts reveal underlying ideologies informing many issues in mass mediated public discourse; among them political partisanship, religious extremism, scientific skepticism, and general distrust of media outlets. By posting an article from a satirical news outlet in one's own personal online space and then inviting others to comment on that news under a completely different context, these articles often become confirmations of a worldview that was the initial target of the satirist. This is not to say that it actually strengthened or reinforced those beliefs, determining that outcome is well beyond the scope of this study. Instead what I am arguing is that through the process of remediation articles from *The Onion* were reinterpreted as they were remediated through social media outlets. The

contexts of these articles then changed as they were remediated creating an ironic exchange that is "heavily dependent on context" (Brummett, 2010, p. 91). As the medium was refashioned to address the challenges of the newer medium the original ironic meaning of the text changed to address the newer context created in the exchange on Facebook. The ironic meaning was similarly remediated, refashioned to address the new context. Remediation works to rhetorically articulate the text, along with refashioning the context, while irony becomes the method used to reveal the multiple meanings of the text, with each influencing the other. Form and content become mutually dependent on one another.

Second, effort was made to highlight how discourses targeted by the satirical intent of *The Onion* were often the exact same discourses revealed in the reactions to the article. One of the most striking features of these exchanges is that individuals are often completely willing to accept a story, no matter how outrageous, if it confirms their perceived worldview. This is aided by *The Onion*'s focus on mimicry of traditional journalistic forms in creating mock news stories. After analyzing numerous examples where *The Onion* sparked reactions that unintentionally affirm the discourses they sought to dismantle, I argue *Literally Unbelievable* updates previous findings from political communication and humor scholars regarding the risks of satire in public discourse, adapting these findings to address texts operating in a new media environment. What these examples indicate is in contemporary mass mediated public discourse satirical texts are becoming increasingly indistinguishable from their targets. It also creates a bit of an unstable irony, meaning it is not exactly clear where the ironist is supposed to stop.

While attempts were made to provide a compelling reading of a text containing multiple ironies, and keeping in mind that this text was assembled for the specific purpose of drawing readers' attention to these multiple layers, it is conceivable that the ironic layers of meaning would continue to multiply as these posts are further remediated through Facebook. As indicated in the analysis of first example (see Appendix A for reference) each post on *Literally Unbelievable* provides a hypertextual button inviting individuals to share the example in their own social networks if they so choose. While it invites further participation it also complicates how to interpret an ironic text if the mediated context is constantly shifting. If irony as a rhetorical strategy is understood broadly as saying one thing but meaning the opposite (Booth, 1974; Kennedy, 1991; Plato, 2001) it can be difficult to discern what oppositional meanings are intended as *The Onion* is continuously remediated through Facebook. The discourse could easily chain out in indefinite double meanings (Booth, 1974), changing with each decision to share with others.

Finally, this analysis reminds readers that while "the rhetorical work of irony is to cement social bonds" (Brummett, 2010, p. 92) it can also divide them. As mentioned in Chapter 2 irony has its origins in mockery (Kennedy, 1991), a definitional history that continues to influence the rhetorical risk of irony to this day. At the same time John Lippitt (2000) argues that with its focus on contradictory meanings irony is often associated with the incongruity theory of humor, where laughter is predicated on the recognition of contradictions. However what can be observed throughout this chapter is that in order to recognize the textual wink of the remediated ironic meaning the reader is often placed in a superior position to the individuals in the text, an outcome associated

with the superiority theory of humor.[50] In other words it is not a stretch to claim that much of the dialectic between rhetor and audience in *Literally Unbelievable* happens at the expense of the individuals who do not recognize the text as humorous. While I argue that the focus is largely on the discourses themselves and not the individuals, such comparisons may be inevitable.[51] The significance here is that irony as a discursive strategy employs an overlap between humor predicated on incongruous discourses and humor predicated on making one group feel superior to another. When doing an ironic analysis of this text, or any text for that matter, the critic should be aware of how individuals are excluded from sharing in the double meaning of a text, as those situations are matters of rhetorical significance as well. Understanding how political satire complicates meanings shared among social groups remains a matter of scholarly importance, regardless of medium (Meyer, 2000; Gring-Pemble & Watson, 2003; LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009). *Literally Unbelievable* explicitly illustrates this phenomenon.

At the same time I argue the benefit of such analysis is that through the remediation of media forms and their contribution to the creation of multiple levels of ironic meaning, readers of the site are able to observe actual examples of the lengths people will go to interpret news that does or does not fit into preconceived worldviews. The rhetorical work of irony in this chapter does not offer much in the way of envisioning more productive discursive practices or providing a way to intervene in countering

[50] For a detailed discussion of the incongruity and superiority theories of humor see Perks, 2008.
[51] As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the identities of the individuals included in *Literally Unbelievable* have been removed for the purposes of anonymity.

problematic discourses. But when combined with a rhetorical understanding of remediation, irony does operate as a heuristic to enable a more nuanced understanding of public discourse in an age of new media. The purpose of this chapter has been to rhetorically document such phenomena. In the next chapter I analyze a situation where irony and remediation were employed for the purposes of social change.

Chapter 5: Irony and Remediation in an Analysis of @BPGlobalPR

In this chapter I extend the rhetorical work of irony and remediation to the social media site Twitter. Like the remediated articles from *The Onion* via Facebook, the discursive features of Twitter allow for the interplay of multiple discourses functioning in an ironic tension. This will be illustrated in an analysis of the Twitter account @BPGlobalPR, an account satirizing statements made via British Petroleum (BP)'s Twitter account @BP_America in response to the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Beginning nearly a month after the initial spill, @BPGlobalPR served as a satirical response to efforts made by BP to shirk responsibility and more importantly recoup their public image in the wake of one of the most disastrous oil spills in US history. For the purposes of this dissertation, the rhetorical work of @BPGlobalPR reveals the presence of irony and remediation in the discursive features of Twitter, particularly discourses that respond to highly visible mediated events. This rhetorical work highlights how Twitter operates as a discursive form. Similar to the responses highlighted in *Literally Unbelievable* from the previous chapter, this text employs an element of ambiguity predicated on mimicking a particular discursive convention, in this case a corporate Twitter account. However, unlike the previous chapter this text operates in relation to a specific target, with the implied ironic "edge" (Hutcheon, 2004) of the text easier to discern.

There is also a more explicit context against which this text operates. Whereas the previous chapter illustrated how a multilayered, remediated text, revealed a variety of

discourses endemic to mass mediated public discourse, this text responds to a particular situation. In this sense it was created for a specific purpose and to address a particular situation. Social media use often peaks during major events, particularly those that are accompanied by widespread media coverage, because that media coverage is increasingly disseminated throughout social media outlets as well. @BPGlobalPR's response to the widely reported environmental disaster in the Gulf of Mexico is one such situation. As a critical tool irony is well suited to respond to such situations because the controversy revealed a disconnect between the efforts made by BP in the Gulf of Mexico and efforts to recoup their mediated image. Using the medium of Twitter @BPGlobalPR made that disconnect explicit, using irony to draw attention to the discrepancy between BP's actions and words. The visibility of these efforts in a social media context suggests the audience is in some level of sympathy with the criticism. When deploying irony for the purposes of critique Hutcheon (2004) argues, "the interpreter as agent performs an act—attributes both meanings and motives—and does so in a particular situation and context, for a particular purpose, and with particular means" (p. 11). That @BPGlobalPR created such a large online following as the pressure on BP mounted indicates that the use of irony to render critique is a powerful tool in new media context. At the same time, since it relies on double meanings and ambiguity in order to create those meanings, the ironic intent of @BPGlobalPR was not always readily apparent. This was evident in the institutional pressures levied on the account to explicitly reveal its satirical nature, pressures which were then remediated by @BPGlobalPR as it continued to respond to the controversy.

As I demonstrate in this chapter rhetoric of @BPGlobalPR works to illustrate the broader features of Twitter as a discursive form.

The medium of Twitter provides an opportunity to investigate such controversies for several reasons. First, the audience of @BPGlobalPR continued to grow as its online activity increased, highlighting a reconfigured notion of audience in social media contexts. As mentioned in Chapter 2 the interplay of meaning and intent key to a dialectic understanding of irony enables the possibility of a "systematic attempt to *carve out* an audience" (Burke, 1969b, p. 64) in an increasingly fractured media environment. The audience to which @BPGlobalPR addresses is not prefigured but rather self–selects in the act of "following" the account.[52] Second, the discrepancy in the amount of followers between @BPGlobalPR and the account it attempts to satirize, @BPAmerica, suggests that the irony of the account is rather stable.[53] Social media audiences tended to recognize the account as satire, while the mounting pressures to "reveal" its satiric intentions came institutionally from both Twitter and British Petroleum. This highlights a tension between the institutional and non-institutional discursive features of Twitter. Robert Glenn Howard (2010) argues the current age of participatory media forms, of which Twitter is a part, relies on a blending of both institutional and non-institutional discourses. As I argue in this chapter these forms rely on an ironic tension that was

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[52] "Following" is understood as a discursive feature of the medium, which is explained in more detail in a later section.

[53] In May of 2011, one year after the creation of the account, the number of Twitter followers of @BPGlobalPR stood at 182,473. By contrast the official account for the company, @BP_America, has 18, 378, nearly ten times fewer. As of July 2014 the followers for @BPGlobalPR and @BP_America have somewhat narrowed, standing at 133,000 and 90,800 respectively.

exploited by @BPGlobalPR for the purposes of satire. Third, the discourses satirized by @BPGlobalPR not only criticize the efforts made by BP to take responsibility for the spill they also reveal larger ideological anxieties over the notion of corporate personhood. The spill, and BP's response, took place only months after the 2010 Supreme Court decision in the case of *Citizen's United v. FEC*, where restrictions on campaign contributions by private corporations were significantly relaxed. I argue that the efforts made by @BPGlobalPR to satirize the response of BP must be understood in relation to this decision because it highlights a much larger context regarding how Twitter operates as a discursive form. Ostensibly Twitter is understood as a medium where individuals can post and respond to information as *people*, while at the same time private companies, organizations, government entities, and other groups can do the same. That BP attempts to pose as a person on Twitter, while also functioning legally as a person, creates a rhetorical complication that served as a major element of @BPGlobalPR's use of ironic remediation.

In this chapter I argue the Twitter account @BPGlobalPR further illustrates the rhetorical processes of irony and remediation in satirizing efforts made by British Petroleum in responding to the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil spill. The rhetorical features of this response reveal ongoing ideological anxieties regarding corporate personhood and corporate influence in mass mediated public discourse. This chapter unfolds in three parts. First, I provide a background of the situation involving the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in April of 2010 in order to give the necessary context addressed by @BPGlobalPR. Second, I briefly survey academic literature involving the notion of corporate

personhood, focusing largely on its rhetorical dimensions. This section also includes a discussion of how irony and remediation relate to the discursive features of Twitter. An understanding of how the discursive features of Twitter rhetorically relate to irony and remediation will enable a fuller illustration of how they work to reveal the ideological anxieties of corporate personhood. Third, I analyze selected tweets from @BPGlobalPR focusing on how they illustrate the process of remediation in constructing ironic double meanings aimed at criticizing BP's response to the spill. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the potential implications of the ironic and remediated potential of public discourse via Twitter.

BACKGROUND OF DEEPWATER HORIZON SPILL

On April 20, 2010 an explosion on the Deepwater Horizon oilrig in the Gulf of Mexico ruptured a pipe, spewing thousands of barrels of oil into the water. The rig, owned by British Petroleum (BP) became the locus of a major controversy surrounding the cleanup and who was to be held responsible. At the forefront of the controversy was CEO Tony Hayward who, along with BP, was harshly criticized for being unprepared for such a disaster. When the leak was finally stopped 87 days later and officially sealed 92 days later, an estimated five million barrels of oil had leaked into the Gulf.[54]

Sharp criticism did not only come from the Obama administration and the mainstream press, but from social media outlets as well. From a public relations

[54] Information and statistics on the spill taken from the *New York Times* overview at http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/business/companies/bp_plc/index.html?inline=nyt-org

standpoint the BP oil spill was a major challenge. Foss (1984) argues that mediated efforts by corporations to craft a new public image face a major challenge when that public image contradicts the symbolic image projected by a major crisis. However one attempt at addressing the public relations nightmare took a decidedly different approach. On May 19, 2010, nearly a month into the spill, an account on the social networking site Twitter named @BPGlobalPR and identified as "BP Public Relations" responded to the controversy by posting the following message:

> We regretfully admit that something has happened off of the Gulf Coast. More to come.[55]

The significance of this account stems not from the impetus to respond but from the type of posts. As the post humorously underscores, the response by BP to "admit" anything was awry in the Gulf of Mexico, let alone take responsibility, was ridiculously overdue. However @BPGlobalPR is not the "official" Twitter account for British Petroleum. Rather it is a spoof, meant to mimic the response, or lack thereof, by BP to the Deepwater Horizon spill by satirically commenting on the various inadequacies of BP's response to the disaster. In less than a month the account garnered over 165,000 followers on the site and drew the attention from both BP and Twitter, who jointly pressured the creator of the account to publicly reveal its satirical intentions. With reports of more than 100 million registered Twitter accounts since the sites launch in Fall 2006, posting more than 55 million messages, or "tweets" per day ("Twitter User Statistics Revealed", 2010), the

[55] All tweets obtained from the Twitter page of @BPGlobalPR found at https://twitter.com/BPGlobalPR

potential for reaching wide audiences is momentous.[56] The potential to reach such widespread audiences has not gone unnoticed by corporations looking to increase their social media presence. At the same time efforts made by corporate entities to engage with individual persons within the same discursive space creates a complication that invokes contemporary ideological anxieties involving corporate personhood in mass mediated public discourse. In the next section I outline some of these tensions.

RHETORICAL DIMENSIONS OF CORPORATE PERSONHOOD

Though reinvigorated in the aftermath of the 2010 Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* controversies surrounding corporate personhood go back more than a century. Several scholars trace the origins of corporate personhood to at least the late 19th century (Allen, 2001; Strate, 2010; Heresco, 2012). Lance Strate (2010) focuses on an 1886 Supreme Court decision involving the Southern Pacific Railroad Company's invoking of the 14th Amendment to assert corporations have the same legal rights as individual persons. Strate notes a noteworthy feature of these legal challenges is that the 14th Amendment was invoked more often in cases involving the legal rights of corporations than it was on behalf of former slaves whom the "equal protection" clause was ostensibly designed to protect. Others have noted the explicit First Amendment concerns regarding corporations' legal status, especially as they have applied to media corporations (Allen, 2001), have contributed to an expansion of the corporate "person." Aaron Heresco (2012) notes efforts to increase legal conceptions of

[56] According to this report, Twitter is growing at a rate of 300,000 new accounts per day.

corporations as persons have largely taken place in the context of political campaign contributions over the last four decades. There is also evidence that legal rights of corporations have begun to expand more distinctly "human" rights. The June 2014 Supreme Court decision in the case of *Burwell v Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc*. ("Burwell v Hobby Lobby," 2014) effectively asserts religious freedoms to corporate entities, a right that would seem to serve only to further complicate the distinction between corporate and natural persons for the purposes of corporate tax exemptions. As is often the case, the expansion of a corporate person's rights occurs at the expense (especially monetarily) of a natural person's rights.

The purpose of this section is not to weigh in on the legal precedents set by these rulings, nor is it to give a survey of the various cases in question. Echoing a sentiment offered by Heresco that, "to fully address the legal workings of *Citizens United* would take this research far afield of an ethical analysis" (2012, p. 24) I aim to avoid an expansive discussion of the legality of the corporate person. Rather my focus here is to highlight the rhetorical dimensions of these decisions. These rhetorical dimensions revolve around contradictory discourses of the "person". I contend a corporate person exists as a rhetorical articulation. Strate argues that while the Supreme Court has made efforts to distinguish between "legal" and "natural" persons, these legal distinctions are rhetorically murky. Since they are granted increasingly similar legal protections, "officers of the court are just as prone as anyone else to make erroneous identifications" (2010, p. 283). Strate's argument is that semantically corporate and natural persons are difficult to distinguish, using the same word "person." When discussing the issue of

corporate personhood, even from a legality perspective, these distinctions become increasingly cloudy. Strate continues, "call a corporation a *person* and you start to think of it as a person, even if you started out with the distinction between legal and natural" (283). Though focusing on the semantic difficulties of a corporate person, such difficulties can be understood as rhetorical as well. If the legal definition of a person produces a contradictory meaning of the "individual" then rhetorical analysis is a necessary component to unpacking those meanings. This struggle over contradictory meanings certainly applies to corporate personhood. Heresco argues a corporation's existence reveals a "(paradoxically) incorporeal nature" (2012, p. 28) in that corporations are legal creations that act on behalf of individuals but they have no individual autonomy themselves. Rather, Strate argues, "corporations are nothing more than extensions of human persons, meaning that they are inventions, technologies, media" (2010, p. 284). Since they are inventions of legal discourses and only exist through mediated language, language that creates material effects on audiences, a corporation is rhetorically articulated. It is a product of discourse. As I argue in this chapter Twitter enables discursive practices whereby an individual person and a rhetorically articulated corporate person occupy the same mediated space serving to further complicate the distinction between the two.

Since the rhetorical articulation of corporations as persons rests on a series of contradictions, understanding these contradictions via an ironic rhetorical structure is beneficial. This is especially the case in an increasingly fractured media environment. Allen (2001) argues, "with the growing corporate ownership of American media, the

Court has struggled to find clear reasons for how the press is different from corporations" (p. 255). While writing largely in reference to print and television media these concerns can be applied to new media contexts as well. If corporate persons are rhetorical constructions that are technologically mediated then it is important to investigate how these "persons" operate as those technologies are remediated. This is especially important when considering that media, like corporations, are discursive products influenced by both institutional (organizational or corporate) and non-institutional (or personal) practices. Twitter in particular serves as an excellent opportunity to investigate these contradictions because individual and corporate persons all operate according to the same discursive features. Since multiple different "persons" all have the opportunity to operate in relation to one another the distinctions between legal and natural person become even murkier in this setting. They also provide the basis for a successful use of irony as a rhetorical strategy. Before discussing these features it is necessary to briefly revisit how new media technologies rely on an ironic tension between institutional and non-institutional discourses.

IRONY AND REMEDIATION IN TWITTER VERNACULAR

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, unlike the remediated text of *Literally Unbelievable*, the Twitter account @BPGlobalPR functions as a satirical response to a specific situation within a specific context. Its use of irony is intentional and relatively stable whereas much of the rhetorical work of the previous chapter involved the interplay between stable and unstable ironies. As such it highlights the

presence of the rhetorical "edge" of irony articulated by Linda Hutcheon (2004) while within the discursive features of a medium that relies on an ironic tension between institutional and non-institutional discourses. In this section I briefly revisit how irony and remediation inform discursive action on Twitter.

First, ironic meaning is created in relation to the situation to which an ironist responds. Hutcheon reminds that irony is "inclusive and relational: the said and the unsaid coexist for the interpreter, and each has meaning in relation to the other because they literally 'interact' to create the 'real' ironic meaning" (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 11). The interaction between meanings that create an ironic double meaning also constitutes irony's critical "edge." An ironist constructs a multilayered meaning for the purposes of evaluating a particular discourse. This judgment is revealed in the recognition of a double meaning. As mentioned in Chapter 2 this process happens in relation to a specific situation, with the audience encouraged to share in the construction of the ironic meaning. Hutcheon continues "the interpreter as agent performs an act—attributes both meanings and motives—and does so in a particular situation and context, for a particular purpose, and with particular means" (11). In order to understand the edge embedded in an ironic meaning, the audience must also recognize the context within which the statement operates. In this analysis the larger context involves ideological anxieties regarding the legal rights of corporations as persons as well as the immediate environmental crisis in the Gulf of Mexico.

Second, Twitter can be understood as a participatory medium. Often characterized under the term "social media", much like Facebook and Tumblr, Twitter

operates largely through the posting of messages by its users. As a medium it is constituted through participation. Robert Glenn Howard explains this constitutive function of rhetoric in technological contexts as the "vernacular mode" of discourse (2010, p. 240). Rhetorical action in these contexts is both enabled and constrained by the discursive features of the medium, which are themselves products of social, material, and rhetorical conditions. Howard writes, "the social factors that have operated to form communication technologies result in institutional intentions becoming embedded in online vernacular discourse" (246). Howard's position that a vernacular mode emerges in the interplay between the structural constraints of a technology and the manner in which individuals manipulate those constraints to suit their purposes resonates with Bolter and Grusin's stance that remediation combines immediacy and hypermediacy in order to "remake themselves and each other" (2000, p. 5). Additionally, if the material and social conditions that enabled the development of new communication technologies become ideologically embedded in those technologies then they can be refashioned as those technologies are remediated. In the case of blogs (web logs) Howard argues that "official" discourses provided in a blog post operate simultaneously alongside an audience's ability "to post their own informal comments and responses" (2010, p. 240).[57] In arguing that all participatory media works in this manner, Howard indicates that formal and informal discourses operate in relation to one another to structure communicative action in online discursive arenas, forming a specific discursive

[57] This same principle could also apply to the ability to leave comments on a Facebook post, a major feature contributing to the ironic meanings created in the previous chapter. In this chapter I highlight how Twitter explicitly enacts this principle.

vernacular of new media discourse. In terms of irony and remediation this concept of the vernacular is important for this chapter because it focuses on how the structural constraints of a medium are refashioned to address how that same medium is actually used rhetorically. Howard alludes to this rhetorical structure as well when characterizing participatory media as "an ironic discursive moment" that "encourages transformative discourse" (240). In other words, the vernacular mode of participatory media enables a unique discursive space with "all voices, or personalities, or positions, integrally affecting one another" (Burke, 1969a, p. 512). As a participatory medium Twitter relies on a specific vernacular influenced by the institutional discursive features of that medium. In the next section I provide an explanation of those discursive features.

INSTITUTIONAL DISCURSIVE FEATURES OF TWITTER

Before moving on to follow the confluence of irony and remediation in the tweets of @BPGlobalPR it is necessary to clarify some of the specific institutional discursive features of Twitter. By institutional features I mean the hypermediated elements that both enable and constrain rhetorical action within the medium. Twitter is a social networking site where users can post short messages and read the messages of others. In order to read the posts of other users one must "follow" them, adding them to their list of accounts whose messages they wish to receive. This is often done in a reciprocal fashion where users "follow" each other, constructing their own audiences and constituting part of the audience of others. The act of posting, or tweeting, is one of the primary ways to

gain followers, an attempt to "*carve out* an audience" (Burke, 1969b, p. 64) in an intentional manner.

The first, and most important, of institutional constraints on the site is that all messages posted to the site have a limit of 140 characters. Messages that exceed this limit will not be accepted for posting on the site. If brevity is the soul of wit, then the constraints wrought by this limitation would necessitate such cleverness, or non-institutional practices. Working with this institutional constraint, some third party software developers have implemented applications that provide shortened versions of Uniform Resource Locators (URLs), commonly referred to as website addresses. Often these URLs can be much longer than 140 characters would allow, providing a technological hindrance to users who want to post links to other websites in their tweets, a common vernacular strategy in Internet discourse. In developing software that shortens these links, while still directing users to the same sites, effectively creates an institutional feature that enables more complex vernaculars to develop on the site. Users can more effectively reference other online content, providing further context to statements made in tweets posted to the site. These links are then remediated, as they are understood in relation to the rest of the message posted via Twitter.

Second, users can interact with the tweets of others. This interaction can happen in a variety of ways. Users can reply to a particular tweet, with the username of the account becoming highlighted in the responding message. These responses can then be searched and often are displayed directly under the original tweet. Another strategy involves clicking an icon below an individual tweet, a practice known as "favoriting". In

favoriting a tweet a user indicates a sense of approval, whether it is agreeing with the message, appreciating a sentiment, or recognizing a humorous joke. The most important interaction between users on Twitter involves the "re-tweet," or RT, where one user can repost the tweet of another into his or her own timeline. This is the most explicit example of remediation in the discursive features of Twitter and serves a function similar to favoriting. The technological affordances of Twitter also enable users to edit and add additional commentary to a RT, provided these additions do not exceed the 140-character limit. These additions serve to reinterpret the message of the additional tweet, further embedding the process of remediation into the discursive features of the medium. When taken in conjunction with the amount of followers an account has, RTs and favorites are often used a metric to gauge how visible or popular a tweet has become. As I argue throughout this chapter @BPGlobalPR often exceeded @BP_America in this capacity.

Finally, Twitter enables users to link their tweets to other tweets through a process known as "hashtagging." A "hashtag" is a label placed in a particular tweet that "tags" it as part of a specific group of tweets. This is done by placing a # sign before a certain word or phrase, creating a link that can be searchable throughout the site and allows users to place tweets as part of a larger conversation than their immediate followers. For example, if a user is posting a tweet about a specific policy by the President of the United States and wants it to be included in a larger conversation on Twitter about said policy they can place the hashtag #PresidentObama within their post. This labels the tweet as one specifically about the president and serves as a searchable term throughout the site. In the tweets of @BPGlobalPR hashtags are often used as a way to add humorous

commentary to tweets, frequently serving as the textual wink to an ironic statement. One example is the use of the hashtag #BPCares, often appearing at the end of tweets from @BPGlobalPR that mock BP's lack of compassion for those affected by the Deepwater Horizon spill. The institutional vernacular of the hashtag, created for the purposes of labeling a tweet as part of a larger discursive community, is used for non-institutional purposes, as an ironic punctuation to a tweet. Regardless of intent any hashtag functions as a searchable link, meaning that it is quite possible that satirical and non-satirical tweets will be placed alongside one another when searching for a particular hashtag. Given that this visibility is also related to how popular a tweet is, how many times it has been reposted and favorite by other users, a situation could occur where the satirical account is more prevalent than the non-satirical account. I now turn to an analysis of relevant tweets of @BPGlobalPR's response to the Deepwater Horizon incident.

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF @BPGLOBALPR

In order to rhetorically analyze the Twitter feed @BPGlobalPR in relation to the contexts mentioned above I specifically focused on the time frame of May 2010 until October of 2010. This time frame covers the initial post from @BPGlobalPR and continues through lingering developments stemming from the reaction to the account. This time frame is by no means exhaustive of the rhetorical action of either account. The Twitter accounts for both @BPGlobalPR and @BP_America remain currently active but the frequency of posts dropped considerably after this time frame, though not entirely as I will discuss in the final section. I focus on the specific context that is most salient to the

immediate purpose of the satirical account.[58] Ten total tweets were selected, chosen for the ways in which they specifically illustrated irony and remediation in the discursive vernacular of Twitter. These tweets range from the first one posted by @BPGlobalPR in May of 2010 until October of 2010 when the initial crisis had subsided and issues regarding ongoing legal and economic damages became the concern of the account. While verbally comprising a small amount of the total discursive output of the account these ten examples serve as an effective representative sample of how @BPGlobalPR used the discursive features of Twitter of ironically critique the response by British Petroleum to the Deepwater Horizon spill while rhetorically revealing broader ideological concerns over corporate personhood. When posting the text of each tweet I have made sure to also highlight the date in which the tweet was posted as well as provide the shortened URLs of any hyperlinks embedded in the tweet. Where appropriate the additional context revealed by the hyperlink is discussed with reference to the additional source.

> The initial tweet from @BPGlobalPR is a decidedly downplayed understatement:
>
> We regretfully admit that something has happened off of the Gulf Coast. More to come.
>
> --May 19th

Occurring thirty days after the initial explosion this tweet mocks the perceived slow response by BP to address the issue. In "regretfully admitting" to the situation the tweet

[58] As of July 2014 there have been 526 total tweets from @BPGlobalPR, with the most recent occurring in December 2013.

provides an ironic reversal of meaning of more traditional public relations rhetoric, working as an attempt to highlight the slow response by BP to acknowledge a rapidly escalating environmental disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. In claiming there is "more to come" the tweet creates an ironic double meaning signaling forthcoming information on the situation in the Gulf of Mexico as well as further ironic statements from this account. The tweet can be understood as operating at both levels of meaning. In mimicking the discursive form of a public relations press release, refashioned to address the challenges posed by the medium of Twitter, the tweet creates an ironic meaning that deliberately downplays the severity of the situation. Given that media coverage from multiple outlets had been highlighting the rapidly deteriorating situation at the site of the explosion this tweet operates against a context in which the "something" that had happened was likely already apparent. In ironically positing an official position that attempts to inform followers of something they already know to be the case @BPGlobalPR reveals an ironic edge aimed at critiquing the slow response to the disaster.

In addition to highlighting the slow efforts by BP to address, and often even acknowledge, their culpability in one of the largest oil spills in U.S. history @BPGlobalPR also offers suggestions for how BP is working to recoup its public image. These suggestions are similarly phrased in the language of public relations, creating an ironic juxtaposition of meanings that continuously highlight efforts made by BP to shirk responsibility. Consider the following justification, appearing on Twitter three days after the initial tweet:

> Thousands of people are attacked by sea creatures every year. We at BP are dedicated to bringing that number down. You're welcome!
>
> --May 22nd

This tweet works to offer an alternative justification for their inaction in responding to the widespread destruction of wildlife habitats in the area surrounding the oilrig. Rather than refusing the address a growing environmental crisis in which they are inherently responsible BP instead is cast as the company that is looking out for customers from threats of attack from dangerous sea creatures they may encounter while hundreds of miles off the coast of Louisiana. The ironic meaning serves to cast a criticism into a virtue, intentionally misnaming the situation as an unintended case of environmental stewardship. In highlighting that BP is "dedicated to bringing that number down" in reference to the number of living animals in the Gulf of Mexico, @BPGlobalPR invokes an ironic reversal of BP's own refusal of responsibility. The deliberately absurd justification, that the company actually used the oil spill as a mode of animal population control, serves to highlight the similarly absurd lack of culpability assumed by BP in keeping those same animals safe (a theme explored in later tweets). When read ironically the tweet suggests BP is actively engaged in doing everything they can to deny any indication of wrongdoing, invoking a deliberate edge (Hutcheon, 2004) that draws attention to the crisis and invites further criticism.

As the Twitter feed progresses tweets begin to further reveal a dialectic tension between language and action in BP's response. The following example serves to ironically comment on a much larger motive for inaction by BP in the Gulf of Mexico. In

addition to the public outcry over the paltry response by BP toward the spill there were also calls for punitive measures to punish the company financially for negligence. Not only was the cleanup expected to be quite expensive but also severe fines were expected to be levied. However given the profit margins enjoyed by many of the worlds largest oil companies, of which BP is certainly a part, such measures seem almost comically ineffectual. Highlighting the monetary disincentive to cleaning up the Gulf of Mexico in a timely manner @BPGlobalPR claimed

> If we had a dollar for every complaint about this oil spill, it wouldn't compare to our current fortune. Oil is a lucrative industry!
>
> --May 23rd.

Here the reasoning behind BP's slow response is laid bare. Using flippant language highlighting how profitable it is to run an oil company the tweet reveals an ironic tension between two competing discourses. On one hand BP needs to be held financially responsible for their actions. On the other hand BP makes so much money with these same actions that any financial punishment would pale in comparison to continuing these same actions. The tweet places these competing discourses in an ironic tension, with the audience invited to see them operating simultaneously in the hopes of revealing the underlying cause of inaction toward cleaning up the oil spill.

The ironic understanding of these initial examples is fairly straightforward, with a relatively short statement creating a double meaning that is understood against a larger context. Working within the 140-character limit mandated by Twitter these examples certainly adhere to the discursive features of the medium but do so in a manner that

avoids other hypermediated discursive features. In the next several examples the role of remediation becomes more explicit in contributing to the ironic meaning of @BPGlobalPR's response to the Deepwater Horizon spill.

As mentioned in the previous section, one of the major discursive features of Twitter is the hashtag (#). This feature allows users to tag a message with a searchable label, signifying it as part of a larger conversation throughout the site. The hashtag as a hypermediated feature is an example of an institutional discursive component of the medium (Howard, 2010). At the same time users do not always use a hashtag for the explicit purpose of categorizing a tweet to be found by others at a later date. In the case of @BPGlobalPR hashtags were often employed to add an extra layer of ironic meaning, adapting the institutional function of the feature for a non-institutional purpose.

The use of hashtags also allows for remediation to play a role in influencing the ironic meaning of @BPGlobalPR's tweets. Since hashtags were initially intended as a way for multiple users to participate and respond to one another on a series of topics, their ironic use by @BPGlobalPR serves to refashion this function to enable users to participate in the satirical response to BP. When accompanied with shortened URLs enabling for outside links to be embedded in tweets hashtags enable ironic tweets from @BPGlobalPR to become remediated. On May 29th, 2010, 10 days after the initial posting but 40 days into the unchecked spill, hashtags and shortened URLs began to appear on the feed:

> Still accepting visual PR submissions (photos/graphics/etc)- These are everywhere: http://tinyurl.com/3aatebb - submit w/ #bpbillboards.

--May 29

While this tweet itself does not offer much in the way of an ironic meaning, it invokes an ironic hashtag and a hypermediated link to a website showing a series of tweets from @BPGlobalPR juxtaposed with actual images of the cleanup in the Gulf.[59] The website, created by a New York City based graphic designer identified only by the first name "Emily", invites users to submit images from the Deepwater Horizon cleanup that feature tweets from @BPGlobalPR (see "BPGlobalPR Billboards," 2013). These images involve graphic photos of marine wildlife covered in crude oil from the seeping well, juxtaposed with ironic tweets from the account. In refashioning these tweets within the context of a graphic image serves to remediate the initial ironic meaning of the tweet. In labeling them as #bpbillboards these images also remediate the form of a corporate billboard in order to add an extra layer to the ironic meaning of the original tweets. One image, reveals a bird lying face up completely covered with oily water that is best described as thick sludge. The caption of the image contains the following tweet:

> So *you* want to see pictures of **dead animals covered in oil** and *we* are the bad guys?! Sick bastards.
>
> -- June 3

These refashioned tweets are user-generated. That is this site serves as an indication that those who follow @BPGlobalPR, and thus a part of its audience, were invited to share create their own images that refashioned the original tweets from the account.

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[59] All images can be found at the official URL: http://www.iridetheharlemline.com/twitter-photos/bpglobalpr-billboards/

@BPGlobalPR then uses the hashtag to ironically label their PR efforts as part of a larger re-branding process. In calling for these images to be submitted using the hashtag label "#bpbillboards", @BPGlobalPR allows for its followers to participate in the ironic remediation process, holding the institutional and non-institutional discursive features of Twitter in a productive ironic tension.

The remediation process is further revealed given that the images used in these digital billboards are themselves repurposed from other sources. Most of the photos are from the *Boston Globe*'s coverage of the spill (see "The Big Picture", 2010), digitally altered to incorporate tweets from @BPGlobalPR into the image. In remediating digital photos from a mainstream news outlet in order to provide a refashioned visual context to the original tweet, these images further solidify the relationship between irony and remediation in the work of @BPGlobalPR. These images suggest the ironic work does not end with the reading of a tweet, but is part of an ongoing dialectic between audiences. Hutcheon reminds that irony is a "communicative process; it is not a static rhetorical tool to be deployed, but itself comes into being in the relations between meanings, but also between people and utterances and, sometimes, between intentions and interpretations" (2000, p.13). In this context, the relation between meanings allows both the original image and the ironic tweet to mutually influence one other. In working "to remake themselves and each other" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 5) these images serve as an example of how new media texts invite further participation, with said participation working to adapt older texts address newer contexts. Rather than implying an image of a "dead animal covered in oil" in order to construct the ironic meaning, users can how click

on the link in the tweet and be confronted with an explicit image, providing a specific context within which to reinterpret the statement. That this remediation process happens in relation to such a graphic (both in the digital and troubling sense) image serves suggests irony has been given a critical edge in drawing the audience's attention to a troubling situation.

The next several examples illustrate how the ambiguity of @BPGlobalPR served to reveal broader ideological anxieties over corporate personhood. As noted in Chapter 4 a satirical text must appear to closely mimic the form of its target in order for it to work rhetorically. In order for an ironic meaning to even be possible a certain level of ambiguity is necessary, meaning that (temporary) confusion is often an unfortunate byproduct. This is certainly the case with @BPGlobalPR. The account name @BPGlobalPR works as satire partially because it looks remarkably similar to @BP_America, the official account of Beyond Petroleum and the primary online public relations arm of the company. As attention to the former increased the latter was faced with more damage control, especially since the satirical account had created a much larger online audience than the official account. Mainstream news outlets also began to address the ambiguity, noting some of the tweets from @BPGlobalPR "are dry enough to be confused for the real thing" (Mascarenhas, 2010). Pressure began to mount for @BPGlobalPR to explicitly reveal its humorous intentions, most notably from an institutional source (Twitter) and the target of its satire (British Petroleum). Almost immediately @BPGlobalPR incorporated this controversy into its use of irony, with the following tweet serving as a primary example:

Will Twitter pleas shut down @BP_America – no one can tell if it's a joke!

#bprebrand

--June 9th

In calling to shut down the official Twitter account for BP on the grounds that "no one can tell if it's a joke," along with a hashtag that labels the effort as nothing more than an attempt to revise the corporation's image, a rather stable ironic meaning is created. This ironic meaning is mainly predicated on a wink to the audience that "knows" @BPGlobalPR is not the official account for BP. At the same time the ironic meaning serves to point toward the very real attempts by BP to control the media narrative involving @BPGlobalPR's visibility. As noted in the introduction to this chapter @BPGlobalPR has crafted a much larger online presence than BP's official account. This larger presence suggests a higher level of visibility in online forums, meaning that tweets from the satirical account would likely overshadow tweets from the official account. Given the ambiguous nature of @BPGlobalPR, which is central to its ability to successfully mimic @BP_America, BP appeared quite concerned that audiences might conflate the authenticity of the two accounts. In other words, BP was concerned that another *person* was posing as them.

They were right. The account was eventually traced to comedy writer Josh Simpson, who while appearing on a panel at the 2011 SXSW Interactive Media conference claimed his initial intention was for individuals to not recognize the account as satire at first (see "Secrets of Fake Twitter Accounts", 2011). Noting that the whole point was for individuals to think @BPGlobalPR was actually representing BP was part

of what made the satire work, Simpson reveals one of the fundamental rhetorical features of irony informing @BPGlobalPR, that the reader must temporarily be duped by the text in order to later uncover the ironic meaning. Rhetorically the demands that @BPGlobalPR reveal its "true" identity, along with the ironic tweet responding to these demands, can be understood as evoking ideological anxieties regarding corporate personhood. In calling on @BPGlobalPR to reveal its identity a tension between a legal and a natural person is revealed. Both occupy the same discursive space of Twitter in this context. That individuals may not recognize which is the "real" account places both @BPGlobalPR and @BP_America in a position where both are simultaneously authentic and inauthentic individuals. Furthermore, as the popularity of the account increased Simpson added a small team of writers to help keep up the ironic façade (Honan, 2010). Just as a corporation is a collection of individuals acting on behalf of a singular legal person, so too were a team of writers acting to pose as a singular legal person. While audiences likely "know" that BP is not a person, just like individuals "know" that corporations are not persons, when rhetorically articulated through Twitter the legal and the natural mediated person coexist simultaneously. Since they must use the same discursive features, with one closely mimicking the other, an ironic double meaning involving whom exactly is the "real" BP is created.

Both British Petroleum and Twitter pressured the creator of @BPGlobalPR to officially reveal its satirical status for those who did not understand it was a joke. Ultimately @BPGlobalPR did reveal its satirical origins, though with an important

caveat. On June 8th 2010, one day before the previously mentioned tweet, @BPGlobalPR changed its official biographical information on the account homepage to read,

> We are not associated with British Petroleum, the company that has been destroying the Gulf of Mexico for 51 days.

The number of days was then changed every day to reflect the continued spilling of oil in the Gulf, ending after a cap was finally put on the well 92 days after the initial explosion. While this statement is not an actual tweet it does align with the overall process of irony and remediation enacted by @BPGlobalPR. In "admitting" to audiences that the account is a fake, @BPGlobalPR uses irony to refashion its underlying intent for its audience. The explicit dissociation with BP creates a situation where the differences between a satirist and the target of their satire could not be more different. The ambiguity is removed entirely and yet an ironic reversal of meaning remains apparent. In this situation it could be argued that BP would have preferred the ambiguity.

The incorporation of hyperlinks into tweets enables Twitter users to expand their commentary beyond the 140-character limit imposed by the site. The ability to incorporate links allows individual users to fashion an additional context to their messages, guiding the reader toward a specific relational meaning. Many of the previous examples of @BPGlobalPR used these shortened URLs in order to provide additional context to aid in understanding the ironic meaning of a tweet. The use of this discursive feature increased as cleanup efforts became the focus of the Deepwater Horizon spill. This is likely due to the fact that the account began to focus on various efforts to stall or avoid the cleanup process as it evokes images similar to the damaged wildlife from

previous tweets. These do not make for compelling stories from the perspective of BP, a company invested in avoiding unfortunate associations at all costs. These avoidances in the face of a lengthy cleanup process became a considerable focus of @BPGlobalPR. As news of cleanup efforts spread so did the use of hyperlinks by @BPGlobalPR to highlight some of the ways BP continued to avoid responsibility. This is evidenced in the following tweet:

> Cleaning up oil spills is expensive. Buying judges so we can keep drilling? Relatively cheap. http://ow.ly/21W3b
>
> --June 22

The link takes readers to a *Huffington Post* article outlining a federal judge's overturning a moratorium placed by President Obama on offshore drilling in the wake of the Deepwater Horizon incident (see "Obama Offshore Drilling Moratorium," 2010). The joke of "buying judges so we can keep drilling" as "relatively cheap" considering the financial implications of the disaster explicitly refers to a revelation in the linked article about the U.S. district Judge Martin Feldman, who had a financial stake in at least eight petroleum companies, including ones involved with both BP and the Deepwater Horizon oil rig. The tension between the ironic statement of the joke "buying judges so we can keep drilling" and the actual report that indicates the joke may have literally occurred are revealed as the user clicks on the link. Without doing so the context is not readily apparent. Again since irony is "heavily dependent on context" (Brummett, 2010, p. 91) the ironic meaning is only partially understood without the relevant context. Incorporating the shortened link rhetorically structures the tweet so that the user must

follow the link to a different medium in order to fully understand the meaning of the statement. The ironic meaning is created through remediation. In following the link the tweet is refashioned to address a specific situation whereby a federal judge with an extreme conflict of interest works to absolve BP of wrongdoing and allow for the continuation of the same practices that created the disaster, further highlighting a preference for the legal rights of a corporate person. The tweet can then be understood as an ironic reversal of the real "costs" of a massive environmental cleanup.

Another major theme is the level of incompetence in BP's efforts to stop the leak as the cleanup process continued. Several tweets humorously underscore these difficulties. Like the previous example they make extensive use of hyperlinks to draw the audience's attention to a specific context. The following tweet constructs an ironic meaning that must be understood in relation to the hyperlink:

> Yeah, we're throwing paper towels on this mess. Who cares? There are plenty of trees left in the gulf. http://ow.ly/21Tp2
>
> -June 22

The link in this tweet directs users to a news report outlining a plan to clean up oil soaked beaches by dropping "oil absorbent paper-based pads" on the ground (see Mick, 2010). As the joke pointing to the link indicates, there seems to be little difference between these "paper-based pads" and the commonly used paper towels, especially when the environmental impact is considered in light of the latter half of the tweet that "there are plenty of trees in the gulf." By intentionally misnaming the situation to create an ironic double meaning around the phrase "paper towels" @BPGlobalPR invites its audience to

consider the absurdity of the situation by casting the efforts in equally absurd terms. While the article itself similarly refers to these absorbent pads as paper towels, @BPGlobalPR additional comment that "there are plenty of trees left in the gulf" serves to place the cleanup efforts in relation to the already harmful environmental record of BP, linking them to deforestation efforts made by other multinational corporations throughout the world. The irony is revealed as readers are confronted with the mutually conflicting positions of using an environmentally hazardous method to clean up an environmentally hazardous situation.

As the cleanup continued slowly onshore and in the water stopping the source of the leak continued to elude BP officials. Attempts to stop the leak involved a series of stopgap efforts to place a protective cap over the ruptured oil lines. Not surprisingly this proved to be quite difficult. The cap that had been placed over the leak to stop the flow of oil into the gulf had to be removed because of an error committed by the submarine robot working at the base of the rig. This mistake did not go unpunished, revealed in the following tweet from @BPGlobalPR:

> One of our robots knocked the cap off the well. Don't worry, he's grounded for 2 weeks w/ no allowance. http://ow.ly/22lnV
>
> --June 23

The link redirects to another *Huffington Post* report explaining the error of an underwater robot in tampering with the cap, causing it to be removed and again sending oil flowing unabated back into the gulf (see "Oil Cap Removed," 2011). The anthropomorphic joke of grounding a robot "for 2 weeks w/no allowance" posits the responsibility for the

mishap on an errant piece of technology, not on the inability for human agents to devise and implement a plan to actually stem the unrelenting tide of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. It also evokes the idea that BP is tweeting as a person, rhetorically articulated through chronicling efforts to punish errant technological children. In playing on this ironic reversal of meaning involving a robotic repair device acting as a human @BPGlobalPR likens BPs efforts to that of a disapproving parent over an errant child. Rhetorically BP is ironically articulated as a person, albeit one that remains steadfast in shirking responsibility under the guise of punishing a child. The absurdity of the statement, coupled with an embedded hyperlink to provide a remediated context, enables @BPGlobalPR to ironically conflate a corporate person as a natural person.

The Twitter accounts for both @BPGlobalPR and @BP_America remain active but their impact, much like the attention to the Deepwater Horizon spill, seemed to have waned. With the well capped on August 6th, 2010, public interest and outcry over the incident subsided, fading as potentially yet another mediated spectacle. This declining interest and outrage was somewhat foreshadowed by @BPGlobalPR, who on July 8th, 2010, posted

> We're the 4th most profitable company in the WORLD & stocks are rising. So yeah, we've learned our lesson. http://ow.ly/28SNh

The tweet reveals that despite the financial penalties and massive public outcry, BP posted nearly $17 billion in profit in 2009 and had stock trending steadily upward now that the crisis had largely faded from the public consciousness (see "BP Named the Fourth," 2010). There is also evidence that any financial penalties accrued by BP may be

short lived. As of June 2014 BP has pressured federal courts to overturn rulings requiring them to pay hundreds of millions in damages to local business affected by the spill (McGill, 2014). These repeated attempts to evade financial restitution not only signal BP's continued efforts to avoid punishment, they align with Strate's (2010) claim that corporate personhood initially developed as a mechanism for corporations to avoid financial responsibility for their actions, again highlighting that the legal rights of corporate persons often come at the extent of natural persons. By sarcastically admitting, "yeah, we've learned our lesson" @BPGlobalPR highlights that any financial penalties pale in comparison to the financial incentive to adhere to the same business practices. Followers are instructed to recognize the tonal cues of the statement, reading it ironically.

From an environmental standpoint, the impacts of BP's actions in the Gulf continue to be felt despite the declining attention paid to the spill. More than four years after the Deepwater Horizon spill the area continues to face substantial environmental damage, with trace amounts of oil from the rig continuing to poison wildlife as far away as the state of Florida ("Researchers Say Gulf of Mexico," 2014). The struggle to address these ongoing impacts are reflected in the most recent tweet from @BPGlobalPR, posted in December of 2013:

> Allegations that our oil causes lung disease in dolphins are ridiculous. Plus blowholes are basically cigar holders. on.wsj.com/19y8oNa
>
> -- Dec 19

The link directs readers to *Wall Street Journal* article highlighting outbreaks to lung disease among dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico due to oil exposure from the region

affected by the Deepwater Horizon spill (see McWhirter & Fowler, 2013). The tweet evokes a rather graphic image of a dolphin's respiratory system. The second sentence serves to deny the accusations addressed in the first sentence, creating an ironic meaning invoking early efforts made by tobacco companies to deny the link between smoking and lung cancer. In positing an absurd claim that respiratory disease in dolphins is due to the carcinogenic effects of cigar smoking the tweet works to ironically deny similar carcinogenic effects of ingesting oil. In this context a dolphin is anthropomorphized into a duped cigar consumer, reminding followers of similar attempts by tobacco companies to deny their own culpability in the health effects of their business practices. When these last few tweets are understood in relation to the others examined in this chapter followers (at least the remaining ones) might consider the lasting impacts of using the discursive features of a social media format to satirize attempts made by a major corporation to eschew financial and environmental responsibilities. In the final section of this chapter I discuss some of these lasting impacts.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I analyzed how @BPGlobalPR used the discursive features of Twitter to satirically respond to efforts made by British Petroleum to avoid financial and environmental responsibility following the April 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Through the examination of a series of tweets responding to BP's own response to the spill I argued that @BPGlobalPR highlighted how irony and remediation are deployed for the purposes of satire in a new media context. This analysis built upon the analysis in

the previous chapter by illustrating how irony can work to direct an audience toward a specific critical judgment, with the audience recognizing an implied "edge" (Hutcheon, 2004) to the discourse. Additionally, this analysis claimed that the ironic remediation of @BPGlobalPR works to reveal broader ideological anxieties regarding corporate personhood, especially as they pertain to the continued expansion of legal rights granted to corporations, often at the expense of individual persons. These anxieties, I argue, are embedded in the ironic meaning of many of the tweets of @BPGlobalPR. Furthermore, through an explanation of how the discursive features of the medium serve to adapt institutional features for non-institutional purposes I worked to highlight how @BPGlobalPR articulated an audience much larger that that of the official @BP_America, creating a larger "following" that served to heighten the visibility of the ongoing crisis in the Gulf of Mexico. While I argue this visibility is important there are several important caveats to consider with this analysis involving pseudonymous authorship on Twitter and the limitations of mediated satire as a form of social critique.

First, when analyzing the rhetoric of @BPGlobalPR it is difficult to not attribute rhetorical agency to the account itself and not the person posting the messages. Throughout the analysis @BPGlobalPR is posited as an autonomous individual with rhetorical agency, rather than as a pseudonym for an individual disguised as a BP spokesman. The same could be said for those who run corporate twitter accounts. Though we "know" that BP is not a person, tweets sent out on the corporation's behalf rhetorically constructs BP as a single autonomous person and not a collection of legal articulations. BP the corporation becomes BP the person when rhetorically articulated

through the medium of Twitter, occupying the same discursive space as other individuals. Many of the tweets of @BPGlobalPR address an audience as if speaking interpersonally, using personal pronouns and language suggestive of a dialogue between a speaker and audience. Acting as an ironic corporate *mouthpiece* @BPGlobalPR highlights the ironic tension between the institutional features of a medium and its non-institutional uses. If a corporate person and a natural person must use the same discursive features of a medium in order to communicate it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish the two rhetorically through that medium. This distinction was highlighted by the fact that BP itself (a pronoun that can denote both a person and a thing) tried to engage with an individual "posing" as a corporation and in so doing revealed their own attempts to pose as an individual.

At the same time this contradictory distinction is central to the ironic functioning of @BPGlobalPR. The use of pseudonyms has long been a major feature of irony. Socratic irony is predicated on the notion that Plato (as the writer) is speaking through Socrates (the character) in the Platonic dialogues. Lippitt (2000) notes the heavy use of pseudonymous authors in the works of Soren Kierkegaard are central to his thoughts on irony, arguing that many of Kierkegaard's most important works are written ironically. Therefore a lasting rhetorical impact of @BPGlobalPR is that its "author" uses a pseudonym in order to ironically pose as another person, in this case a corporate person, further illustrating how new media forms can refashion older ones. The satirical nature of the account would not have worked had the author used their "real" name. That the pseudonym attempts to obfuscate the real identity of the person posting the messages so

that they can be more believable as a corporation only serves to further highlight the similar obfuscation between corporate and natural personhood in an age of new media.

Second, @BPGlobalPR operates primarily in a mediated space, itself a rhetorical articulation that has limited material effects. This is the especially the case when faced with the very real effects of a massive environmental disaster. It is important to note that the satirical intervention of @BPGlobalPR did translate into a material intervention as well. At the height of its popularity @BPGlobalPR was able to raise $20,000 for gulf restoration efforts through the sale of ironically titled "BP Cares" t-shirts available through a website linked to the Twitter page (McClure, 2010). Accompanied with the media exposure received that kept the focus on BP's lack adequate response these efforts are not without merit. But when taken in the context of lasting environmental impacts in the Gulf of Mexico, continued reports of massive profits by BP, and @BPGlobalPR's own satirizing of BP's ability to evade any sort of real punishment, these efforts obviously pale in comparison. From a legal, financial, and environmental perspective the corporate person may have had the last laugh.

However, rather than a serving criticism of satirical efforts made by the writers of @BPGlobalPR to hold British Petroleum accountable for their actions I argue this discrepancy be taken as a reminder of the limitations of mediated responses to social problems that have material consequences. Using irony and remediation @BPGlobalPR used the discursive features of Twitter to reveal some very serious social problems stemming from increased corporate influence over legal, economic, and environmental concerns. These concerns have material consequences that are becoming increasingly

blurred as mass mediated public discourse becomes increasingly intertwined with the material world. This chapter demonstrated that while irony and satire continue to shape our understanding of new media structures, their consequences cannot be addressed solely through the clever use of a technological medium. In the next chapter I examine how irony and remediation contribute to the transition between online and offline spaces.

Chapter 6: Irony and Remediation in the "Text" of Occupy Wall Street

In this final case study chapter I illustrate how irony and remediation worked rhetorically in the development of the Occupy Wall Street protests. As mentioned in Chapter 3 this case study relies upon the fragmentary nature of texts in contemporary mediated culture in order to construct a "text suitable for criticism" (McGee, 1990, p. 288). Whereas the texts in Chapters 4 and 5 were relatively stable, consisting of a singular website or Twitter feed (albeit ones that incorporated textual fragments from other mediums) the "text" analyzed here is a product of multiple outlets working in relation to one another. The theoretical focus on irony throughout this dissertation, including its relationship to remediation, has been predicated on the increasingly fragmentary nature of rhetoric in the contemporary mediated environment. The speed at which texts are created and proliferate in online contexts means that text and context are increasingly articulated alongside one another, comprising a mutually influential relationship. As I argue throughout this chapter this speed and relational quality allowed Occupy Wall Street to achieve a far-reaching and multifaceted visibility in a relatively short amount of time. This publicity occurred often in stark contrast to more traditional modes of media exposure levied by mainstream media outlets. Online deliberation was much more nuanced, deliberative, and playful.

The use of Occupy Wall Street as a case study is beneficial for several reasons. First, the protests were themselves noted for their decentered and fragmentary nature. There was, and remains, no fixed structure or "author" of the discourses surrounding the

protests.[60] This fragmentary construction served as a basis for both criticism and praise from detractors and supporters respectively. The rhetoric of OWS functioned in a network of meanings and in the relations between meanings, interpretations, and peoples, a central feature to irony as articulated by Hutcheon (2004). Second, the manner in which these protests achieved publicity relied on an ironic rhetorical understanding of several elements of public sphere theory. As alluded to in Chapter 2 these elements are mutually dependent upon one another, serving to highlight the process of remediation in new media technologies developed out of these conditions. Third, these protests, and the discourses rhetorically associated with them, served to blur not only notions of public and private but the distinctions between online and offline as well. Christine Harold argues that in the contemporary media environment, "bodies and images of protestors were as much a part of their rhetoric as their words" (2007, p. 50). These bodies in the immediate sense achieved publicity through the hypermediated screens of social media.

The strategic use of media to achieve publicity in an increasingly media saturated rhetorical environment is not unique to social media. Rather social media outlets represent an opportunity to investigate how these strategies are refashioned to address current contexts. Neal Gabler (1998) identifies this phenomenon as the "secondary effect." "If the primary effect of the media in the late twentieth century was to turn nearly everything that passed across their screens into entertainment," Gabler argues, "the secondary and ultimately more important effect was to force nearly everything to turn

[60] Though as I will argue throughout this chapter the "origins" of the protest can be traced to the satirical and politically charged publication *Adbusters*

itself into entertainment in order to attract media attention" (p. 96). I argue this is the case with the use of social media by OWS protestors and supporters. While not necessarily entertaining in a traditional sense, the use of technologies often deployed for the purposes of entertainment, marketing, and advertising have proven remarkable strategies to achieve visibility in an increasingly corporate controlled media environment (Harold, 2007). DeLuca and Peeples (2002) argue the use of technological "screens" has enabled social and political protestors to tap in to the desire for mass media outlets to cover events of a spectacular nature. Using the affordances provided by increasingly mobile communication technologies they argue media savvy activists have enjoyed widespread success at achieving publicity without relying on traditional mass media coverage. Occupy Wall Street followed in this tradition.

In order to demonstrate the presence of irony and remediation in the social media use of Occupy Wall Street I analyze a series of texts constituting the protests' hypermediated presence. Throughout these texts I note the presence of two specific tropes. The first is "Occupy," a phrase I argue plays on an ironic meaning related to military occupation. The second is the "99 percent" trope, a reference to the amount of collective wealth maintained in the United States by the lower 99% of population in terms of socioeconomic status. These tropes constitute a lasting rhetorical impact of Occupy Wall Street on public discourse. While irony also serves as a master trope (Burke, 1969a) its focus on dialectic is conceived separate from the tropes of "Occupy" and "99 Percent." As they were disseminated throughout social media outlets these latter two tropes were remediated to address a variety of situations related to Occupy Wall

Street in a surprising number of texts. The manner in which these tropes were edited, altered, argued over, and played with demonstrates a refashioned notion of public deliberation in new media forms. These texts include the blog post entitled "#OCCUPYWALLSTREET" posted on the website for anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters*. The use of a hashtag in this post remediates the institutional features of Twitter while introducing the "Occupy" trope into a broader public vernacular. The use of Twitter to enable individuals to more effectively "occupy" a physical space is part of this refashioning. In addition to using social media to articulate an embodied protest, I analyze how both "Occupy" and "99 percent" tropes were remediated via other social media outlets. These outlets include the Tumblr blog "We are the 99 Percent" as well as more playful reinterpretations of these tropes. Throughout this analysis I highlight how irony and remediation play a role in proliferating these discourses throughout online contexts, with those contexts operating in relation to one another. I argue OWS operated according to the rhetorics of irony and remediation in revealing the possibilities for political intervention and deliberation in an era of social media. The texts examined in this chapter are intended to be understood in relation to one another, with many of them relying heavily on parody, irony, and satire in order to constitute a broader rhetorical context of Occupy Wall Street. The relational aspect of these texts serves to further illustrate the significance of remediation to refashioning public discourse in an age of new media.

The most explicit link to irony and satire in this case study is the relationship between OWS and Canadian anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters*. Considered one of

the main progenitors of the protest phenomenon known as "culture jamming" *Adbusters* is perhaps best known for a series of satirical advertisements, or "subvertisements" (Harold, 2007), targeted at the late consumer capitalism in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. As I highlight in this chapter *Adbusters* was the first entity to explicitly call for individuals to "Occupy Wall Street" doing so in the aforementioned blog post as well as their own Twitter account in July 2011.

Furthermore, this chapter extends scholarly work focused on understanding the refashioned rhetorical elements of the public sphere in an increasingly fragmented media environment. DeLuca and Peeples (2002) argue that contemporary public deliberation and dissent is increasingly mediated through "screens." Accounting for processes of mediation, and remediation, become more salient as the "most important, public discussions, take place via 'screens'" (131). OWS certainly occupied a large and highly contested mediated space of discussion, revealing tensions between traditional and non-traditional media outlets role in public discourse. "The charge for critics" they contend, "is to chart the topography of this new world" (147). The focus of this chapter, as in the previous two case studies, is to contribute to this charting.

The analysis of irony and remediation of OWS occurs in two parts. I begin first with a brief background of the OWS protests. I highlight the early stages of the protest, with a gesture toward their lack of coverage by mainstream media outlets. The framing of Occupy Wall Street from mainstream news sources suggests a much different characterization than those that played articulated on social media sites. The focus on social media discourses enables an analysis suggestive of a much more robust discursive

arena. This section includes a brief overview of satirical anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters*, the publication credited with formulating the initial OWS protest. Given its significance as one of the premier examples of "culture jamming" (Harold, 2007) the dark humor and tradition of pranking by *Adbusters* serves as the most explicit link between OWS and irony. As such it is worth understanding how rhetorical strategies of *Adbusters* align with the larger rhetorical context of OWS. Second, I focus on how both "Occupy" and "99 Percent" were remediated through a series of texts that spread via social media outlets. These include the blog post #OCCUPYWALLSTREET from *Adbusters,* the Twitter account @OccupyWallStNYC, the Tumblr "We are the 99 Percent," the website "Occupy Sesame Street," and the "Casually Spray Everything Cop" meme. I argue each of these texts works in relation to one another by remediating the tropes of "Occupy" and "99 Percent" to comprise a larger mediated context of OWS. Several of these texts occurred in relation to specific protests while others served as a site of deliberation among social media users, blurring the distinctions between online and offline. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the potential implications of this analysis.

BACKGROUND OF OCCUPY WALL STREET AND ADBUSTERS

It could have just as easily been a prank. Canadian anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters*, which focuses on critiques of media practices and the ideologies of late consumer capitalism, called upon those fed up with corporate financial greed and the tacit support by U.S. politicians to take their frustration directly to the source: Wall Street in

Lower Manhattan. Registering the domain name OccupyWallStreet.org on June 9th, 2011 posts soon followed on the *Adbusters* blog calling upon citizens to swarm the financial district of New York ("#OCCUPYWALLST," 2011). Among the clutter of information typical of the Web *Adbusters* call to "Occupy Wall Street" went initially unnoticed over the summer of 2011. This was perhaps not wholly surprising from a publication generally relegated to independent bookstores and more noted for satirical images parodying well-known advertisements from corporate giants such as Nike (see "Spoof Ads").

However, thousands of people showed up that September. The same blog post referencing a spatial location of the protest invoked the use of the hashtag #OccupyWallStreet to help organizers communicate via social media.[61] Exact dates and origins of a hashtag's presence on social media are often hard to pinpoint, though Ben Berkowitz of Reuters speculates that it started less than a week after the initial blog post from *Adbusters* (Berkowitz, 2012). As early as July 15th, 2011 the Twitter account @OccupyWallStNYC posted,

> Sept. 17 Wall St. Bring Tent #OccupyWallStreet
>
> --July 15

Given the overall focus of this dissertation this tweet could be read ironically. Calls to bring a tent invoke an element of outdoor camping, creating an ironic juxtaposition with

[61] As explained in Chapter 5, hashtags are an institutional discursive feature of Twitter that enables individual users to classify messages as part of a larger conversation. This discursive feature is no longer specific to Twitter, as the practice has become embedded in other social networking sites like Facebook and Tumblr. The presence of hashtags, much like the use of keywords in blogs, have become remediated throughout new media formats.

the heavily urbanized outdoor space of the New York City financial district. Similarly the use of a hashtag labeled "Occupy Wall Street" evokes a certain military strategy of forcibly occupying a space against the will of the inhabitants. In this context, "Occupy" refashions the idea of an occupying military force to instead refer to an occupying civilian one. That so many individuals heeded this call suggests that many recognized not only the irony at work in this phrase but the implied "edge" (Hutcheon, 2004) as well. This potentially ironic joke sparked quite a following.

The term "following" could be similarly considered ironic given its double meaning in this context. One of the most noted aspects of OWS is the way organizers used the principles and tools of social media to garner visibility and to mobilize support, particularly in online contexts. In less than a month the Twitter @OccupyWallStNYC had more than 65,000 followers, with similar accounts such as @OccupyWallSt boasting 86,000 during the same timeframe. The visibility of those accounts has only increased with time.[62] The use of Twitter and the proliferation of viral videos and images throughout social media outlets enabled OWS to grow from an ironic metaphor in a countercultural magazine to a sweeping protest that generated a myriad of responses. DeLuca, Lawson, and Sun (2012) argue the range of responses was profoundly influenced by differences in medium. Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston (2006) note the framing of event-driven news stories are often "heavily constrained by mainstream news organizations' deference to political power" (p. 481). Mainstream news organizations,

[62] @OccupyWallStNYC, the account linked to the initial protests, has more than 175,000 Twitter followers as of August 2014. Similarly, @OccupyWallSt has a current following of more than 200,000.

including corporate controlled cable, network, and print outlets, reacted to the protests with a mixture of ignorance, trivialization, and outright derision (DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012). These reactions, they argued, were telling given how widespread the protests became in such a short amount of time. Within a month of the initial protest in lower Manhattan there were estimates of nearly 1000 similar protests in more than 80 countries ("Occupy Protests Around the World," 2011). However on social media outlets the responses were more varied and widespread, ranging along a spectrum from extremely supportive to extremely critical. This discrepancy in coverage can be somewhat attributed to differences in media paradigms, with mainstream outlets more beholden to the same corporate interests targeted by OWS whereas blogs tend to have more user autonomy. At the same time DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun note these differences are not a coincidence nor do they happen in isolation. Both mainstream press coverage and responses via social media occur within the same media environment and so it is likely that even with the dearth of press coverage individuals were exposed to information on the early stages of OWS. This is especially the case if individuals count Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and other social media outlets among their news outlets. Deluca, Lawson, & Sun argue this "media matrix itself is always in flux, an ever-changing combination of myriad media, from writing and print and photography to television and radio and cinema to the Internet and laptops and smartphones" (2012, p. 487). They term this state of flux "panmediation" a term remarkably similar to remediation in both name and concept. At the same time they do not offer much clarification for how it differs from remediation, nor does the concept find much traction in their own analysis of

disparate media coverage of OWS. In fact, though panmediation remains under-theorized in their analysis of OWS protests they do note that the idea resembles Bolter and Grusin's earlier treatment of remediation. In either case what I contend DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun attempt to account for in their analysis of OWS is that differences in media coverage can be attributed to changing media structures. Since they argue these changes are a product of fluctuations between newer and older media forms it is worth exploring how the process of remediation influenced the rhetorical articulation of OWS.

The link to *Adbusters* is also a necessary component to this analysis. That this outlet served as the progenitor of Occupy Wall Street is more than a coincidence. I argue its use of irony, satire, and parody in critiquing consumer capitalism takes on a heightened significance given its relationship to Occupy Wall Street. The magazine's use of these discursive strategies is considered part of a larger trend of what has been termed "culture jamming," a phenomenon where activists stage elaborate pranks or reappropriate symbols of consumer capitalism in order to create a mediated spectacle for the purposes of criticism and resistance. Several well-documented examples of such practices include the group "The Yes Men" as well as many of the protests at the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999. The latter example served as the exemplar for DeLuca & Peeples (2002) theorization for the "public screen" of mediated discourse. The main goal of these practices is to use contemporary principles of mediated publicity to draw attention to their targets of criticism often through the use of satire, parody, and irony.

Up until the development of OWS *Adbusters* brand of satirical culture jamming was largely relegated to their publications, focusing mainly on a series of parodic

advertisements satirizing dominant ideologies of consumer capitalism.[63] In her investigation of *Adbusters*' use of parody and satire, Christine Harold argues, "the defiant stance of *Adbusters* continues a long tradition of industrial sabotage in response to the power of capital" (2007, p. 35). For *Adbusters* this tradition is invoked symbolically rather than materially, drawing upon familiar tropes of consumer advertising that have become commonplace in our mediated environment. Harold continues, "the tropes, images, and values espoused by consumer advertising and the commercial media have so profoundly saturated our lifeworld that it is difficult to imagine ourselves without them" (34-35). Similar sentiments are echoed by Neal Gabler, who argues, "almost everything in life had appropriated the techniques of public relations to gain access to the media" (1998, p. 97). This saturation has a normalizing effect, with advertising images and tropes becoming so ubiquitous as to render them nearly invisible. However, invisible does not mean lacking influence. Rather Harold argues that since "it is difficult to think critically about that which we do not see" (p. 34) *Adbusters*' political intervention involves rendering these tropes visible through a perspective by incongruity. Through the re-creation of familiar advertisements, refashioned to construct an ironic oppositional meaning, *Adbusters* works to "make explicit the logic at work in the ad being targeted" (36). Several high profile examples of these "subvertisements" include plays on familiar advertising logos such as Camel Cigarettes (refashioned as "Joe Chemo"), Calvin Klein's "Obsession" line of perfumes (refashioned as "Obsessed") and the United States flag

[63] Harold (2007) notes that while *Adbusters* has also invested efforts in calling for boycotts, along with advocacy of the so-called "Buy Nothing Day" (BND) protests, it's use of parody, satire, and irony to reveal underlying ideologies of consumer capitalism is a defining rhetorical characteristic of the publication.

(refashioned with corporate logos in the place of 50 stars). The underlying logic of this strategy is that in a hypermediated environment, ironically turning familiar images into unfamiliar ones constitutes an intervention in a capitalist system that increasingly relies on image politics. The use of these discursive strategies effectively places them in relation to the images and discourses they critique. In recognizing the back and forth between both the original and satirical text individuals are invited to identify underlying logics of consumer advertising.

These practices are not without their critics. The largest criticism is that *Adbusters* has become that which it decries. Despite its focus on revealing underlying logics of consumerism Harold notes a "suspicion about the effectiveness of the *Adbusters* brand of negative critique" (2007, p. 54). Focusing primarily on revelation of harmful discourses without offering alternatives to those discourses may strike some as unproductively cynical. Furthermore, given that *Adbusters* itself has become somewhat of an iconic brand invested in destabilizing branding as a mode of capitalist ideology these efforts can be read as hypocritical. Harold explains, "the frustration expressed by *Adbusters*' critics implies that being told what is best for them is no more welcome from *Adbusters* that it is from advertisers" (56). Given that *Adbusters* is often considered the de facto "brand" of anti-consumerist advertising, even going so far as to offer their own signature shoe as an alternative to name brands like Nike, some have charged the organization is not much different from other brands that attempt to capitalize on the discourse of youthful rebellion. Additionally, some have pondered what *Adbusters* hopes to "reveal" in their anti-consumerist branding. Harold writes, "at its best, the rhetoric of

Adbusters appeals to activists because it offers a desirable 'cool' alternative, albeit an alternative that derides consumers' hunger for cool" (58). What exactly the alternative is remained unclear; especially since the ideological critique of *Adbusters'* "subvertising" strategy may not be all that revelatory. Harold continues that the underlying messages offered by *Adbusters* in their satirical takes on popular advertising are ones in which individuals are already aware. For example, the underlying message of the "Joe Chemo" image is that smoking is detrimental to one's health, hardly a groundbreaking revelation, resulting in the possibility that "this brand of culture-jamming rhetoric tends toward smug self-satisfaction" (54-55). Similar sentiments regarding the limitations of ideology critique as consciousness rising are echoed by scholars such as Jodi Dean (2002) and Slavoj Zizek (1994). It is not as if individuals do not "know" they are being marketed to, it is that they willingly play along. Rather than working to reveal underlying logics of which individuals are already aware a more productive rhetorical strategy would be to provide a stronger sense of agency and a space for further deliberation.

One final critique of *Adbusters* involves the very use of satire and irony as rhetorical strategies. Harold argues that *Adbusters* heavy reliance on parody in its satirical critiques of consumerism "perpetuates a commitment to rhetorical binaries—the hierarchical form it supposedly wants to upset" (2007, p. 56). Complementing criticisms that *Adbusters* offers little more than its own "cool" brand of resistance, this critique rests on the notion that resistance must not in any way reinforce that which it resists. Put another way, the criticism of *Adbusters* is that in even mentioning its targets it serves to reinforce dominant ideologies that put those targets in power. This is remarkably similar

to critiques of humor offered throughout this dissertation. Obviously I disagree, but not with the idea that irony, parody, and satire rely on rhetorical binaries. They do. Rather I argue these binaries highlight the relational component of oppositional discourses offered by a commitment to irony. The theoretical foundation of this dissertation relies on uncovering contradictory yet mutually influential logics that operate in relation to one another. An understanding of the trope of irony depends on such an understanding, as does remediation. That *Adbusters* relies on a rhetorical strategy "that presupposes the notion of an original" (55) source, need not mean the publication is somehow indirectly invested in perpetuating the discourses it opposes. Rather, these strategies highlight that text and context are always implied in one another, collapsed in a fractured media environment. As Harold reminds, "one's rhetorical choices are always prescribed by the material and cultural conditions in which one finds oneself" (17). Offering oppositional interpretations of these conditions means working in relation to those conditions rather than effacing them. "Put another way," Harold concludes, "you have to start where you are" (17).

The purpose of this section was to preview the rhetorical strategies employed by *Adbusters* for the purposes of "jamming" ideologies of late consumer capitalism in order to demonstrate how those same strategies are homologous to the development of OWS. The criticisms offered toward *Adbusters*' uses of irony, satire and parody as political intervention remain warranted. Taken alone these strategies remain limited. But when understood in relation to OWS I argue these strategies take on a new significance. In the

next section I demonstrate how irony and remediation contribute to a rehabilitated notion of the public sphere utilized by OWS.

IRONY AND THE REMEDIATED "TEXT" OF OCCUPY WALL STREET

In Chapter 5 I outlined how irony and remediation inform the blurring of institutional and non-institutional discursive features of Twitter. Those same discursive features are relevant to this chapter since I discuss OWS use of Twitter as well I also wish to highlight how OWS reveals the presence of irony and remediation in the blurring of notions of public and private as well as online and offline. These illustrations occur in two parts. First, I focus on the initial articulation of OWS through the *Adbusters* website. Second, I illustrate how notions of spatiality are refashioned as OWS continued to blur distinctions between online and offline as the protests continued.

First, an ironic rhetoric can be immediately observed in the very name of the protest. The phrase "Occupy Wall Street" introduces the trope "Occupy" as a way to characterize the style of opposition. To "occupy" adopts a somewhat militaristic tone, connoting an image of a forceful military occupation of an undefined enemy territory. That this "territory" consists of the physical location of many of the largest corporate financial entities rather than nation-states is especially salient for a protest rooted in anti-corporate resistance. Given increased corporate intrusion into matters of the state an ironic double interpretation of what it means to "Occupy Wall Street" can be inferred, whether that irony is intended or unintended. There is some evidence to suggest the irony is intended. Jurgen Habermas initially forecast the overlaps between matters of public

and private interest. In *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* Habermas immediately warned the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere has been limited by the "'societalization' of the state simultaneously with an increasing 'stateification' of society," (1991, p. 142) complicated by the rise of multinational corporations. The ironic double meaning of "occupy," as both a military presence and anti-government protest, can also be understood in the context of the initial blog post from *Adbusters* site calling for a physical protest. In that post Occupy Wall Street is articulated as "a shift in revolutionary tactics," invoking references to anti-government protests in Egypt, particularly those that occurred in Cairo's Tahrir Square, this time with protests articulated specifically in response to corporate influence on American politics rather than a popular uprising aimed at overthrowing a government ("#OccupyWallStreet," 2011).

Furthermore, an element of remediation can be detected in the use of a hashtag to label the protest on the *Adbusters* blog. As previously mentioned the initial call to "occupy" Wall Street occurred in relation to those in Tahrir Square, which were widely noted for how protestors used the tools of social media to mobilize protest efforts. The use of the hashtag #OCCUPYWALLSTREET in the title explicitly invokes the discursive vernacular of Twitter. From the outset, OWS enacted the logic of hypermediacy in its articulation. Though this is the only mention of social media in the post the use of a hashtag symbol implies the discursive features of social media were to play an integral role in mobilizing individuals to support. The creation of OWS

coincided with the creation of the hashtag #OccupyWallStreet, a hypertextual feature of new media now embedded in the rhetorical articulation of a political protest.

Second, the interplay between hypermediated and embodied protest invokes a refashioned notion of spatiality in contemporary public discourse. Though the focus on spatial location is not new to discussions of publics and counterpublics the increasing mobility of mediated communication continues to warrant attention. In his initial conception of the public sphere Habermas adhered to idealized and often romanticized notions of actual geographic spaces where matters of public importance would be deliberated. However, as Brouwer and Asen indicate, the "notion of a public *sphere* allows Habermas to locate the critical power of a public, which capitalizes on its social location," adding that a sphere metaphor "enforced a clear boundary between public and private" (2010, p. 2). Spatial metaphors permeate much of the conceptions of public and private and scholars have sought to problematize publicity as spatially determined, particularly in the contemporary media environment.[64] Traditional notions of the private sphere have been defined in terms of one's private "home," or as private economic spaces set apart from common public spaces as in the case of "markets". The latter example is especially salient when analyzing the development of OWS. As ideologies of late capitalism continue to permeate more elements of one's private life, what Habermas often termed the corporate colonization of the life world, the spatial distinctions between public and private become harder to determine. Chantal Mouffe argued the political

[64] Spatial conceptions remain difficult to avoid, as I even characterized Twitter in the previous chapter as a discursive *space*.

implications of such a development are, "that today corporations have gained a sort of extraterritoriality" that have "managed to emancipate themselves and appear as the real locus of sovereignty" (2005, p. 120). In the previous chapter I examined the presence of broad ideological anxieties regarding corporate personhood revealed in discursive action via Twitter. Similar anxieties regarding corporate control of public discourse can be understood in the collapsing of spatial distinctions between public and private where the political actions of a corporation occur everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. "Occupy" then can work in the context of both.

Spatial distinctions between public and private have also been complicated by new communication technologies as well. Sheller and Urry (2003) offer the notion of "automobility" whereby increasingly mobile communication technologies, as well as the longer history of the automobile, have created a hybrid of public/private mobility. They write, "the new hybrids of private-in-public and public-in-private do not automatically imply a decline in politics or a collapse in democracy, but may instead point to a proliferation of multiple 'mobile' sites for potential democratization" (p. 108). While not specifically talking about social media sites, the ways individuals use them to communicate with and across a variety of social groups and communities adheres to their privileging of mobility as a major feature of public discourse with new communication technologies. I argued in Chapter 2 this refashioned notion of public and private rests on an ironic understanding of remediation, where the blurring of global markets and networks of communication are "also tied into these everyday forms of dwelling in mobility and screen-mediated communications" (108).

Collapsing distinctions between public and private spaces are not the sole purview of social media screens. In a sense remediation has always worked to create an overlap between the "public" display of "private" expression and vice versa. Since hypermediacy is dependent on the simultaneous desire for immediacy any media will inevitably work to make the private a matter of public view. The ironic tension stems from the notion that these logics are contradictory yet coexist. These same logics that work to remediate conceptions of public and private can be observed in physical spaces as well. OWS illustrated the ironic tension between public and private in the central location of the initial protest at Zucotti Park in Lower Manhattan. Zucotti Park was not the intended location for the protests. DeLuca, Lawson, and Sun (2012) note the original plan was to literally occupy Wall Street, a plan that was thwarted by local police on the first day of protests. As a result the OWS protestors shifted their focus to the nearby Zucotti Park. By shifting to a different location "Wall Street" was refashioned as a symbolic space, a synecdoche for the US financial system. Though unable to physically occupy the actual "location" of the US financial sector, such shifts ultimately worked in the protestors' favor. The park operates as a "privately owned public space" (Adler, 2011), the product of a New York City zoning law designed to break up the monotony of corporate high rises in the city. In exchange for constructing and maintaining these "public" spaces corporations were granted permission by the city to build even taller private buildings. These spaces then exist as a public space fully encapsulated by a private corporate entity. This contradiction exists amid a similar legal confusion as to who exactly controls the space. Since the park is not technically a "public park" according to New York City law

protestors did not have to apply for permits in order to assemble, nor could they be evicted for failing to do so. Working to exploit this unforeseen loophole allowed protestors to remain physically present in the space. The loophole can be understood as the product of the blurring of public and private spaces, as such blurring rendered the legal distinction of the space similarly blurry. Furthermore, that a legally sanctioned corporate incentive was adopted for discursive practices unintended by that incentive indicates more than a passing resemblance to the ironic tension between institutional and non-institutional discourses illustrated in the discursive features of Twitter.

The twin logics immediacy and hypermediacy that constitute remediation were present in this situation as well. Information regarding this legal gray area was disseminated via social media, using technologies developed by private companies to exploit loopholes in public/private spatial locations to reassert a public domain of organization. This is evidenced by the following tweet posted by @OccupyWallStNYC several days into the "occupation" of Zucotti Park:

> #OCCUPYWALLSTREET Tell the @REBNY not 2 pressure city 2 close public parks! Contact info rebny.com/contact_us.jsp #ows Plz RT!!!
>
> --October 20

The link directs users to the Real Estate Board of New York, an organization focused on providing services and information for real estate professionals in New York City. Invoking this organization as part of the larger context of the protests @OccupyWallStNYC aimed to provide followers with information to aid in continuing the protests. This organization then becomes another mediated site of protest. More

importantly this exchange, along with the larger presence in Zucotti Park, illustrates the presence of remediation in the OWS protests. Using the "public screen" (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002) of Twitter in order to mobilize individuals to occupy an actual physical space, while simultaneously using the presence of that physical space as the impetus to spread information via social media outlets highlights the interplay of hypermediacy and immediacy. A hypermediated discursive space is used to invoke an immediate discursive space. Each space is understood in relation to the other, with a blurred distinction between online and offline interactions. In the next section I demonstrate how the trope "99 Percent" was articulated in relation to the calls to "occupy," constituting the broader discursive context of OWS.

REMEDIATED CONTEXT OF OWS

In addition to the specific protests, the discourses of OWS permeated other social media outlets, providing symbolic resources that were remediated by others. These remediated texts should be considered part of the larger text of OWS because they operated alongside the protests, becoming part of the larger mediated context against which OWS operated. DeLuca, Lawson, and Sun (2012) argued deliberation over OWS was much more dynamic and varied on social media outlets than on mainstream news coverage. The examples offered in this section aim to illustrate this refashioned deliberation. The first is the Tumblr site "WeAreThe99Percent," a photo blog dedicated to sharing user submitted stories of economic hardship stemming from the global financial crisis that introduces the "99 Percent" trope. The second is the Internet meme

"Occupy Sesame Street," a humorous parody of Occupy Wall Street that playfully refashions the "Occupy" trope in the context of the popular children's educational television program. The final example is the site "Casually Pepper Spray Everything Cop" a meme that reinterprets a now iconic photograph of a University of California, Davis police officer who infamously pepper sprayed Occupy protestors on the campus of UC Davis in November of 2011. Along with Occupy Sesame Street, this meme remediates "Occupy," creating a hypermediated extension of OWS that served to increase the online visibility of the protests. As these last two examples illustrate, the remediation of OWS images and discourses was never too far from the rhetoric of irony.

First, the Tumblr site "We Are the 99 Percent" presents stories from individuals affected by economic hardships stemming from financial industry practices targeted by OWS. This site is widely considered the introduction of the trope "99 Percent" into mass mediated public discourse ("We Are the 99 Percent," 2012).[65] The homepage of the site explicitly references OWS, linking to the OccupyWallSt website mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Throughout the site viewers are invited to read invited posts from users. The majority of posts consists of the same textual features, a photo of an individual holding up a handwritten note explaining why "I am the 99%," a phrase oft repeated throughout the site. Under each photo is the reprinted text of the message, a remediated version of the handwritten note in the photo. Interspersed throughout the site are embedded video clips, satellite images of protest sites, and links to other articles

[65] The website *KnowYourMeme.com* suggests the phrase "99 percent" was found on a sign carried by a protester and found on an official Occupy website in August 2011, one month before the protests at Zucotti Park.

discussing various aspects of OWS. Much like the remediated text examined in Chapter 4 this site relies heavily on user submitted content. But whereas *Literally Unbelievable* focused on documenting a phenomenon of misrecognized satire, creating an unstable ironic text, the posts here largely serve to constitute a mediated space for deliberation. Through the interplay of multiple media forms, with an emphasis on the handwritten note (the earliest form of mediated communication), the hypermediated elements of OWS are refashioned to address challenges posed by older media. Hypermediacy again gives way to immediacy, as viewers are able to engage with stories presented by individuals who are present in the photographs on the blog.

Criticisms of these mediated stories also played out on social media platforms. Responses to the "We Are The 99 Percent" were met with a similarly titled Tumblr blog "We Are the 53 Percent" (see "We Are the 53%," n.d.). The blog, functioning as an attempt to discredit the stories provided by those invoking the "99 Percent" trope, adopted a nearly identical rhetorical strategy. The attempt to create a "53 percent" trope is attributed to a statistic suggesting 53% of Americans pay more in federal income tax than they receive in deductions. However, the site offers this statistic as part of a misleading claim that only 53% of Americans pay any income tax at all, a claim that is demonstrably false. Nevertheless, Alex Parnee of *Salon* notes the site was created by far-right conservative blogger Erick Erickson, as an explicit attempt to discredit OWS, using "we are the 99 percent" discourses as fodder (Parnee, 2011). The layout of the site looks remarkably similar to "We Are The 99 Percent," using the same visual layout and graphic template as the original. On left side of the screen is mission statement of the blog,

which reads derisively, "those of us who pay for those of you who whine about all of that…or that…or whatever." The posts use the same rhetorical conventions of the 99 Percent blog; with images of individuals holding up handwritten notes explaining why they are "part of the 53%." The explicitly dismissive tone of these posts bares a similar resemblance to the initial framing of OWS protests by mainstream media outlets (DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012). Parnee (2011) argues that several of the posts on the site, as well as the site itself, can be read as an unintentional parody of "We Are the 99 Percent" since many of the claims made by individuals on this site are the exact same concerns voiced by OWS supporters. An individual of differing political ideology could in some ways read this blog as some kind of joke. Parnee writes, "the site can't even manage to correctly represent that 53 percent, with multiple contributors very clearly belonging to the 47 percent of people who make up the supposed parasite class" (2012). He goes on to highlight that there was yet another blog to focused on this contradiction, the aggressively titled "Actually, You're the 47%," which also adopted the same aesthetic layout as the previous two blogs in order to address the claims made by those dismissive of the stories offered by those in "We Are the 99 Percent." An ironic tension can be observed in the discursive features of these exchanges. The same rhetorical strategy, posting images of handwritten notes, and the same stories of hardship, increasing debt coupled with declining social welfare services, were used to support completely opposite interpretations. Individuals posting on "We Are the 99 Percent" appear to be nearly identical to their imagined opponents coalescing around "We Are the 53 Percent" with a third blog working to combine both to highlight both groups experiencing the same

plight. Readers of these exchanges are then invited to recognize the ironic tension of these simultaneously conflicting yet harmonious discourses, playing out on the same mediated platform.

One particular exchange offers further insight. A post on "We Are the 53 Percent" shows an individual holding a handwritten note. The message starts, "I am a former marine. I work 2 jobs. I don't have health insurance. I worked 60-70 hours a week for 8 years to pay my way through college." On its face, these statements read as if they could just as easily be those of an individual from "We Are the 99 Percent." However, the note ends, "But I don't blame Wall Street. Suck it up you whiners! I am the 53%." Despite Parnee's (2012) assertion that this person is quite likely not a part of this statistical group, this post is indicative of the types of messages posted to this blog, including the repeated use of the word "whiners" to characterize individuals critical of the current economic situation in the US. A response to this post on the website *Daily Kos* sought to refute this claim not by disagreeing with the individual's hardship but to highlight that these are the exact reasons why this person should be supportive of OWS (Udargo, 2011). To date this response has been shared more than 149,000 times via Facebook and more than 3,500 times via Twitter, suggesting a viral quality in its ability to spark further deliberation via multiple social media outlets. The conflicting interpretations for economic hardships illustrated in these blogs can certainly be accounted for by differences in political ideology, reasserting the power of such ideologies in determining interpretation of the same information (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). At the same time reading these discordant interpretations in relation to one

another reveal an ironic tension, with contradictory yet mutually influential information coexisting in a mediated discursive space. The "99 Percent" trope and the newer yet less impactful "53 Percent" trope were placed in relation to one another, with one functioning as a near parody of the other.

Second, several texts worked through the playful remediation of both "Occupy" and "99 Percent" in the form of memes. A meme, short for enthymeme and quite possibly the Greek term *mimesis*, consists of a hypermediated image with users able to contribute their own interpretations using the tools of photo editing software. Often memes have accompanying text that can be similarly modified to adapt to specific contexts. Harold (2007) explains memes as "a basic unit of information that travels distributively across publics" (p. 58). The viral characteristic of memes, they are designed to be easily shared and spread across social media platforms, coupled with the ability for savvy media users to manipulate these images to provide their own versions, enables them to constantly refashion discourses to address newer contexts. This renders them a prime example of how remediation works to craft new discursive possibilities by inviting participation in online spaces. Perhaps not surprisingly memes often take on a humorous quality, as individuals use the affordances of digital media to spread a constantly evolving joke throughout the Internet. One such meme used in relation to OWS was "Occupy Sesame Street" in which the "Occupy" trope was refashioned using references to the popular children's educational television show. The website OccupySesameStreet.org appears aesthetically similar to the original *Adbusters* #OccupyWallStreet blog post, even going so far as to include a hashtag in its banner

headline. An example of a meme on the site involves a photo of Cookie Monster with the caption "99% of the worlds cookies are consumed by 1% of the monsters," deliberately invoking the "99 Percent" trope as well ("#OccupySesameStreet," n.d.). Other examples show photoshopped images of popular Sesame Street characters Big Bird, Grover, Bert, and Ernie being forcefully handcuffed by police at Zucotti Park. The layout of the site itself contains numerous embedded links to other websites where individuals have contributed their own take on the meme, all organized using the hashtag #OccupySesameStreet. The timing of these memes indicates they occurred simultaneously alongside the actual protests in New York and throughout the world. In an online discursive space #OccupySesameStreet occurred alongside #OccupyWallStreet. The original and the remediated text work in relation to one another.

A final example of the larger mediated context of OWS is a meme that was even more widespread than Occupy Sesame Street. The meme "Casually Pepper Spray Everything Cop" consists of remediated images involving University of California, Davis police officer John Pike. On November 18th, 2011 as Occupy protests spread throughout the US, specifically on to major college campuses, Lieutenant Pike was photographed deploying pepper spray down a line of student protesters attending an Occupy rally on the campus of UC Davis ("Casually Pepper Spray Everything," 2013). The incident sparked major outrage, as media outlets of all varieties quickly spread the story. Calls for University Chancellor Linda Katehi's resignation in the aftermath were swift due to the viral nature of the story, yet ultimately unsuccessful.

Photos and video of the incident soon made their way onto the Internet, where the capabilities of digital technology enabled individuals to spread modified images throughout the web. By the end of November photoshopped images of Lieutenant Pike began to appear online. Explicitly enacting the process of remediation these images show the image of the police officer superimposed on to a variety of iconic paintings, casually pepper spraying the subjects of those paintings. Two of the more famous, or infamous, examples involve John Trumbull's 1819 painting *Declaration of Independence* as well as Georges Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* ("Casually Pepper Spray Everything," 2013). The image of a police officer clad in full body armor appearing to pepper spray both peaceful park dwellers as well as the signers of the Declaration of Independence remediates both images, offering a refashioned meaning of the original incident. As those paintings have become iconic images in Western civilization, so too does the violent response to the peaceful protest at a college campus. Additionally, the remediated images serve to refashion the incident as somewhat humorous, relying on an ironic tension between the original image and that which it remediates. The refashioned images rely heavily on the logic of hypermediacy. It is unlikely that viewers of these images would be lead to believe that the police officer was actually present in the paintings, nor in any of the other images. The technological capabilities that enable the juxtaposition of these images are not effaced in anyway. In many cases the image serves as a rather crude joke, as in the case of Lieutenant Pike depicted pepper spraying the bust of Thomas Jefferson on Mt. Rushmore. Similar to the example of Occupy Sesame Street, this meme was articulated alongside the discourses of

OWS, becoming as much a part of the protests as images coming from Zucotti Park. Given the speed at which the meme spread throughout the Internet it is quite likely that individuals learned about the meme and the image it remediates simultaneously.

Furthermore, this meme influenced further discursive play, establishing "Casually Pepper Spray Everything Cop" as its own visual trope. In addition to remediated images of Lieutenant Pike spraying other iconic images, individuals refashioned the discursive features of other online mediums to humorously address the incident. Some of these examples included the creation of a satirical Twitter account @PepperSprayCop as well as a slew of humorous reviews for pepper spray canisters on the e-commerce site Amazon ("Casually Pepper Spray Everything," 2013). As these additional examples suggest, the rhetorical significance of the incident is established by the manner in which individuals play with the image.

The significance of these last several examples is to illustrate that the discourses used by OWS protesters were refashioned across a wide array of social media platforms, constituting a networked context that was as much a part of the protests as those who physically occupied public spaces. Specifically, the last two examples of Occupy Sesame Street and Casually Pepper Spray Everything Cop illustrate the use of humor to playfully refashion tropes of OWS across various mediated outlets. For the purposes of public discourse and deliberation it is important to note these examples should hardly be considered trivial. In his critique of the bourgeois public sphere, Nicholas Garnham (1992) notes one shortcoming of Habermas's mode of public deliberation was that he "neglects both the rhetorical and playful aspects of communication, which leads to too

sharp a contrast between information and entertainment and to a neglect of the link" (p. 360). Particularly in online discursive spaces, where images and discourses are incredibly malleable, such links become more noticeable. The memes and extra contextual elements of OWS mentioned throughout this chapter operate in relation to the protests rather than as a separate entity. They contributed to the overall rhetorical environment of Occupy protests. Garnham argues a major challenge of contemporary public discourse is "to construct systems of democratic accountability integrated with media systems of matching scale that occupy the same social space as that over which economic or political discourses will impact" (p. 370). With social media outlets individuals are increasingly "occupying" the same social space and drawing from the same conceptual resources as more traditional media outlets. The ability to play with these resources, refashioning them to work in relation to other discourses, suggests they are as much a part of the deliberation process as more traditional modes of argument and protest (Kuipers, 2011). The myriad of ways in which individuals played and joked with the discourses of OWS should signal as much. I now move to consider some potential implications of this analysis.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I documented the presence of irony and remediation in the rhetoric of Occupy Wall Street. In doing so I worked to illustrate how a variety of texts worked in relation to one another in an online context via their reworking of common tropes emanating from the initial Occupy Wall Street protests. Where appropriate I analyzed

how humorous texts contributed to the discursive construction of OWS, further highlighting how irony, parody, and satire rely on similar principles to remediation in structuring mediated public discourse. Ultimately I argued OWS adheres to many of the same principles of humorous "culture jamming" initially employed by *Adbusters*, with many of the mediated responses to OWS acting as an illustration of these principles. To conclude I offer several important considerations to extend this this analysis. They involve the lasting presence of spatiality in mediated public discourse, and the use of satire as a mode of ideological critique.

First, effort was made in this chapter to highlight how OWS worked to blur the distinctions between mediated and embodied discursive action. I argued the OWS illustrated the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy in how a mediated protest (hypermediacy) worked in relation to an embodied one (immediacy). This claim rests on the idea that spatial location, while refashioned in the context of social media deliberation, still matters. In this chapter I made sure to highlight that public deliberation, while influenced by mediated discourses, should not be considered solely limited to mediation. Rather they work in relation to one another. In her book *Technoculture* Jodi Dean (2002) asserts the notion of a "public" exists only in its material effects. Positing a public that is primarily symbolic can be read as removing spatiality from the equation entirely. The numerous mediated examples that comprise the textual analysis of this chapter would certainly give some weight to this position. At the same time I argued that much of the rhetorical weight behind Occupy Wall Street was how it blurred distinctions between online and offline discursive action. The example of Zucotti

Park functioning as the immediate counterpart to the hypermediated space of Twitter illustrates the mutual dependence of both logics of remediation, as does the example of Casually Pepper Spray Everything Cop. Multiple scholars of publics and counterpublics have rightfully warned against the risk of removing spatiality from public deliberation. Brower and Asen argue that publics provide a means for "people to engage others, but they do so within a field of constraint" (2010, p. 10). This field of constraint can be understood as both material and symbolic. It can also be understood as mediated and remediated. DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun remind that "mediated worlds are real and reality is always mediated (by media, language, culture, ideologies, and perpetual practices" (2012, p. 485). The rhetorical possibilities enabled by these perpetual practices are made possible through a particular field of constraint. Conversely the field of constraint can be modified through particular rhetorical practices that refashion these mediated discursive spaces to address the challenges created by those same media. What can be observed in the case of OWS is the interplay between embodied and mediated protests were held in a mutually dependent relationship, with each working in relation to the other.

Finally, I argued that rhetorics of irony and satire were key to understanding the development of OWS as well as its remediated adaptations. The mutually influential and relational component of these strategies means they less oppose their targets than work in concert with them. As previously mentioned in this chapter one of the critiques of *Adbusters* use of parody (read in this chapter as ironic satire) was its commitment to rhetorical binaries. In order to get the joke as it were one must on some level recognize the initial reference. At the same time Harold (2007) argues that this position places

Adbusters not in opposition to ideologies of consumer capitalism but rather works within them. The criticism that *Adbusters* creates little more than a "cool" brand for those interested in resisting capitalism remains. There are similar risks with Occupy Wall Street. The amount of readily available data on social media use on the popularity of OWS lead to speculation on the potential marketing capacity of the protests. Dumenco (2011) suggests the protests and accompanying discourses resonated to such an extent so quickly that "Occupy" will inevitably become a brand of its own, a forecast that seems to have come true. Similar sentiments of the incorporating nature of late consumer capitalism have been earlier stated by Jodi Dean (2002) and Slavoj Zizek (1994), highlighting that oppositional discourses and perceived resistance to dominant ideologies are always already accounted for. Specifically for Zizek, the rise of cynical reason employed in the distancing of oneself from the system they are critiquing relies on a "paradox of an enlightened false consciousness: one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of the particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but one still does not renounce it" (1994, p. 312). For Dean, the proliferation of communication technologies has contributed to a cultural imperative where the promise of increased democratic deliberation is little more than a fantasy that works to uphold the ideological systems that enabled their development in the first place. Harold similarly argues, "Corporate and anticorporate rhetorics do not *oppose* one another so much as feed off and respond to one another. Increasingly, the market is able to mutate in response to adversity" (Harold, 2007, p. xxxii). Dissent, it seems, may be the mutually influential counterpart to compliance.

Engaging with the full ideological implications of OWS mode of resistance and use of social media are warranted, yet remain far beyond the scope of this dissertation. While I think Zizek is accurate in highlighting ways in which the ideologies embedded in discursive practices are simultaneously used to discredit their potential to dismantle those ideologies, I do not think it is a zero-sum game. If one is to accept Bolter and Grusin's (2000) claim that remediation influences the development of all media technologies, then it stands to reason that these developments have been accompanied by ideological shifts throughout history as well. As I argued in Chapter 2 a shift in orientation requires a bit of casuistry. For Burkean irony to work, it must acknowledge that which it is in relation. That *Adbusters* or OWS perpetuates a commitment to rhetorical binaries should be taken less as a criticism than a feature of a discursive environment adapted to address challenges posed by mediating technologies developed in that same environment. Eventually, an ideological orientation will be stretched until it breaks, but in the meantime individuals will continue to chart the limitations of those orientations. What this analysis shows is one must start with existing symbolic resources, even if those resources have embedded ideologies within them, in order to envision new remediated discursive possibilities. In the final chapter I conclude this dissertation with a discussion of the lasting implications and areas for further research.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation I worked to illustrate how irony and remediation provide useful theoretical characterizations of contemporary mass mediated public discourse. In doing so I have highlighted the ways in which discourses of new media have refashioned, and in many ways complicated, discourses of traditional media. This included lengthy illustrations of how new communication technologies have been used rhetorically to reveal tensions between "newer" and "older" media forms. Much of the underlying humor of the texts analyzed in this dissertation was focused on highlighting those tensions. As I argued throughout this project these tensions point toward the development of new discursive categories in online settings while also gesturing toward refashioned possibilities of public deliberation and political intervention.

To frame this final chapter I wish to return to the opening example posed in Chapter 1. More than three years after his death Osama bin Laden's compound maintains a hypermediated presence in cyberspace. This example serves as an ongoing reminder of the role irony plays in structuring online discourse in new media contexts, particularly in response to cultural and political events. Though news coverage may have subsided the site is continuously remediated, possessing the constant possibility of modification typical of new media texts. The physical location remains searchable on Google, now migrated to its own Google+ social network site where users are invited to engage with one another. The "reviews" of the compound continue to trickle in maintaining the same humorous ironic tone. The most recent comment, posted in July 2014, gives the

compound a "poor" rating (2 out of 5 stars) while writing, "Good privacy from outsiders. A little quaint. Staff was generally non-responsive." While not a particularly good joke this response is in keeping with the rest of the more than 1400 comments that now comprise the mediated existence of Osama bin Laden's compound. Now it is unknown whether or not this commenter *intended* to post an ironic comment to the site. But what can be observed is that this comment exists amid the myriad of other comments sharing a similar stance. Since "texts themselves can create a context that signals the reader that irony is coming" (Brummett, 2010, p. 91) it is entirely plausible that this comment was conceived *in relation* to the others. As the satellite image is remediated in the context of media platform generally intended for users to share personal reviews an ironic response seems quite natural. The dialectic between satellite image and mediated context is accompanied by an ironic expression that similarly works via dialectic between viewing the compound as a fugitive hideout and a poor vacation destination. As in the examples provided in the case study chapters, I argue this text works through irony and remediation.

This chapter concludes the dissertation in three parts. First, I return to my initial research questions, providing answers gleaned from the analysis in the preceding chapters. Second, I address the limitations of the project by highlighting persistent rhetorical complications stemming from this study. Finally, I suggest future directions this research can take.

ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the participatory nature of many of the media outlets analyzed throughout this dissertation it stands to reason that individuals encountering an ironic text in a new media environment will not only be invited to read the rest of the text with an ironic eye but to participate in the further construction of irony as well. This impulse is what I contend is happening in the case of the Google Map of the bin Laden compound. The relationship between irony and remediation was a central focus of this dissertation. This focus returns me to my first research question:

RQ1: What is the relationship between irony and remediation?

I argued that remediation, as a rhetorical structure underlying mediated public discourse, is ironic. This claim rests on a conception of irony as dialectic (Burke, 1969a). I argued irony works via the negotiation of contradictory positions that occupy the same rhetorical space. Similarly remediation works via the interplay of the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy. These logics are contradictory yet mutually dependent upon one another. Bolter and Grusin (2000) argue that all media operate via these logics and that newer and older media are always understood in relation to one another. I concluded therefore that irony and remediation are joined by a similar rhetorical structure. In Chapter 2 I worked to outline this structure. Specifically my focus on a Burkean conception of irony as dialectic provided a counterpart to the twin logics of immediacy and hypermediacy in remediation. Since these logics operate in a contradictory yet mutually influential pairing, with each implying the other, I argued remediation operates with an ironic rhetorical structure. Remediation, like irony, is predicated on a simultaneous back and

forth between overlapping yet contradictory positions. In order to understand how newer media refashion older media the interplay of both logics must occur in mediated texts.

The difference between "newer" and "older" media can be understood as an overlap. New media forms are constituted through this overlap, created in relation to older forms. In recognizing a newer media form audiences are invited to simultaneously recognize that which the newer medium remediates. Television remediated radio and movies, with those forms influencing early texts of television programs. With the development of the Internet computers remediated television, radio, and print. Those forms were then integrated into the textual features of early websites. Over time the newer and older forms begin to resemble one another visually, employing both logics of immediacy and hypermediacy, with newspapers beginning to mimic the visual layout of websites and the windowed layout of websites beginning to manifest in the layout of television screens. Both forms begin to simultaneously adapt one another.

I argued this overlap could similarly be understood as operating ironically. This characterization worked to cast remediation as a rhetorical phenomenon. While not specifically focused on the study of rhetoric Bolter and Grusin allude to remediation as a rhetorical phenomenon because of how it works in relation to other media. Breaking from a determinist notion characteristic of a media ecology perspective Bolter and Grusin instead posit that remediation enables rhetorical agency to be located within media. They write, "to say that digital media 'challenge' earlier media is the rhetoric of technological determinism only if technology is considered in isolation" (2000, p. 78). It is their view, as well as mine in this project, that media technologies do not exist in isolation. They

always work to refashion media that came before, with those earlier media adapting to address new possibilities posed by the newer medium. Since these newer and older media comprise a pairing that is "inclusive and relational" (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 11) I argued this process be understood as ironic. I specifically focused on irony as theorized by Kenneth Burke. Burkean irony, in its focus on dialectic, enables the construction of a double meaning found in the overlap between orientations. For Burke these orientations comprise a general way of seeing the world, calling up specific strategies to address this way of seeing. Burke catalogued several of these orientations into poetic categories. I began Chapter 2 with a discussion of poetic categories, noting how these categories serve to both enable and constrain the selection of responses to a situation. Additionally a rhetor may stretch these categories in order to account for a wider range of discourses while still remaining within a given orientation. As one stretches an orientation in order to address a wider range of responses they can begin to resemble other orientations, what Burke called casuistry. As a result categories often shift into one another, meaning that strategies used to address one category may overlap into another category. Eventually these orientations are stretched to their limit, forcing a break from one situation and constituting another. I argued these orientations must be understood in relation to one another, with irony serving as a way to understand the interplay between an "older" and "newer" orientation. Irony was positioned as a heuristic strategy enabling a rhetor to envision new ways of thinking in the recognition of a double meaning created in overlapping orientations.

I argued the same applies to remediation in how it structures the relationship between newer and older media. Bolter and Grusin note remediation operates through the interplay of two contradictory yet mutually dependent logics. The first logic, immediacy, relies on the process by which communication technologies attempt to make the user forget that they are experiencing a text via a medium. This desire remains an ideal as no medium can fully achieve a transparent immediate experience, thus eventually giving way to a contradictory second logic. This second logic, hypermediacy, is understood as an obsession or fascination with the medium that enables one to experience immediacy. The two logics contradict one another yet are simultaneously present in all media. Irony enables the simultaneous recognition of two orientations occupying the same rhetorical space, sharing a mutually dependent yet contradictory relationship. The recognition of these overlaps is often met with laughter, though laughter is not a necessary component for irony. Because remediation works through a similar dialectic pairing between immediacy and hypermediacy, with both logics coexisting despite their contradictory impulses, I argued remediation operates as an ironic rhetorical structure.

Since irony works in the creation of double meanings, with those double meanings often serving as the basis of a humorous overlap between competing worldviews, I noted humorous texts provide a unique opportunity to illustrate the process of remediation in rhetorical discourse because they rely heavily on irony in their understanding as humorous. The analysis provided in the case study chapters worked to answer my second research question:

RQ2: How can mediated texts of humor illustrate the relationship between irony and remediation?

Humorous mediated texts are uniquely suited to illustrate irony and remediation in online discourse because of irony's relationship to humor. The texts examined in this dissertation relied heavily on irony for the purposes of humor. Because it often plays on the recognition of one thing described as another (Brummett, 2010), irony is a strategy deployed for the purposes of humor. Additionally, these ironic texts were a product of multiple media interacting in relation to one another. I argued this relational aspect is important given the increasingly fragmented nature of the rhetorical environment. Ironic humor then is a useful way to illustrate the process of remediation in new media discourses. In Chapter 3 I outlined a series of methodological strategies informing my approach to analyzing ironic remediated texts. Throughout my analysis I observed a rhetorical impulse to irony embedded in the discursive features of new media forms. Not everyone gives in to this impulse, nor does everyone recognize the existence of the impulse. Nevertheless it is there. And it most often manifests when a mediated event is visible enough to go viral, meaning that irony is a rather natural response to these events. As observed in the case studies the dialectic between hypermediacy and immediacy contributes to the construction of the text since many of the texts examined were created through the combination of multiple media forms. Irony then can be useful both for understanding how the text is constructed as well as how to negotiate the multiple meanings of a text. As I argued in Chapter 3 the interplay between logics could help contribute to the construction of a text, adhering to McGee's (1990) assertion that

contemporary culture is much too fragmented to realistically analyze prefigured, finished texts. I argue remediation provides a helpful conception of how a "text" may be constructed. Furthermore, many of the discourses satirized in the examined texts revealed underlying ideological concerns in the contemporary media age. The analysis of these case studies suggested that the very discursive structure of the Internet is a major focus of humor within that structure. This is a finding consistent with analyses of humor in other mediated contexts. As I have argued elsewhere often the most poignant political satire is directed toward the structure of the media (Faina, 2013). My focus on irony and remediation as underlying rhetorical structures, as well as my focus on the collapsing of text into context, suggests the same.

In Chapter 4 I specifically noted the process of remediation directly contributing to the creation of an ironic meaning throughout the texts of *Literally Unbelievable*. The humor of many of the examples is created precisely through the placing of one medium within another. This "mediation of mediation" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 55) is how the joke in each example is constructed. An article from *The Onion* was remediated through an individual's Facebook page, which was itself then remediated through *Literally Unbelievable*. In each occurrence, an extra layer of irony, both stable and unstable, was created. Much of the irony was predicated on hypermediacy giving way to immediacy, as individuals often cited the existence of a mediated story as evidence that the same mediated story had been suppressed from public awareness.

In Chapter 5 I traced remediation and irony into the institutional features of Twitter, illustrating how they contribute to the development of Twitter as a discursive

form. This was accomplished through an analysis of the satirical Twitter account @BPGlobalPR. Through heavy use of irony and satire, @BPGlobalPR was able to manipulate the institutional features of Twitter for non-institutional purposes, in this case as an attempt to criticize British Petroleum's involvement in the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. In using the hypermediated elements of Twitter in order to create sufficient ambiguity in order to pose as a corporate entity, @BPGlobalPR worked to highlight ongoing anxieties regarding corporate personhood. The ironic adoption of institutional features for non-institutional purposes further highlights the heuristic value of irony in envisioning new discursive possibilities in new media forms. The use of irony to create intentionally ambiguous messages enabled the creation of a much larger audience than the source being satirized. Since the audience of "followers" is not prefigured on Twitter but is created through action I argued the use of irony served a constitutive rhetorical function, predicated on the use of ambiguity to highlight overlapping similarities between the "real" and the "fake" British Petroleum. A lasting rhetorical effect was the ability to reveal broader ideological anxieties at play in online mediated discourse. Specifically, I argued that because Twitter is a discursive arena in which corporate entities and natural persons must share the same rhetorical space using the same rhetorical tools the rhetorics of irony and remediation provide an illustrative glimpse toward ongoing concerns over corporate influence in public discourse.

In Chapter 6 I highlighted how the *Adbusters* blog "#OCCUPYWALLSTREET" served as the origin for the protests of the same name. Invoking the use of a hashtag, a hypermediated discursive feature of Twitter, *Adbusters* worked to remediate that feature

for the purposes of mobilization. Analyzing a series of texts for how they remediate several dominant tropes related to Occupy Wall Street, namely "Occupy" and "99 Percent," I argued the discursive features of new media forms allowed for participation and deliberation. Furthermore, given *Adbusters*' history as a satirical anti-consumerist magazine that draws heavily upon the trope of irony in its efforts to "culture jam" institutions of consumer capitalism, I argued their participation in the articulation of OWS can similarly be understood grounded in irony. In particular, I noted how many of the additional discursive arenas stemming from OWS made heavy use of irony in remediating both "Occupy" and "99 Percent" tropes. Because of the speed in which these extra texts were disseminated I argued they often worked simultaneously alongside the protests themselves.

These case studies addressed highly politicized topics. Through a focus on how they illustrate the presence of irony and remediation as structural elements of new media discourse I noted how they revealed some of the broader ideological and political concerns of contemporary public discourse. This brings me to my final research question:

> *RQ3: What rhetorical implications might these relationships have for communication scholars interested in civic engagement, political participation, and mass mediated public discourse?*

Answering this question proved to be the biggest challenge of the dissertation. I argued the ironic humor found in these remediated texts worked to reveal underlying concerns

related to political knowledge, political partisanship, and political engagement. Posed as an attempt to investigate the potential for irony to foster a stronger sense of civic engagement, my initial hunch was that a strong grounding in irony would provide rhetorical tools to more critically investigate contemporary mediated public discourse. In identifying the rhetorical relationship between irony and remediation I had hoped to establish the potential for irony, and by extension humor, as part of a more robust public sphere. That is to say an ironic understanding of remediation enables communication scholars to better understand the contributions of satire to contemporary mass mediated public discourse.

My initial answer to this last question is found at the theoretical level. Construed broadly, I conclude that rhetorical principles that inform techniques of effective joke construction are the same rhetorical principles that inform effective deliberation in contemporary mediated contexts. Theoretically the rhetorical similarities between irony and remediation provide extensions of research in political communication and public sphere theory. Specifically, I focused on how irony and remediation can inform discussions of shifting media paradigms (Baym, 2009) as well as give insight into how public deliberation has been influenced by new media technologies (Howard, 2010). Shifts in media paradigms are not inevitable, rather they are the product of technological changes and more importantly how those changes are used in relation to one another. The ability to refashion these newer forms for the purposes of humor highlighted the mutually influential relationship between newer and older media. For scholars of political communication I noted the role irony and remediation play in rhetorically documenting

the persistence of misinformation and hyper partisanship in contemporary public discourse. The significance of this insight is established in relation to what I mentioned as a central paradox of the Internet; that individuals have access to more information than at any time in history yet remain chronically misinformed. As illustrated in Chapter 4 the persistence of misinformation hinges upon the hyper-partisan rhetoric characteristic of much of the contemporary news media. The interplay between stable and unstable ironies in the text of *Literally Unbelievable* provided a hypermediated glimpse of the efforts individuals will take in order to remain inside of a political echo chamber. I argued this text provides an effective way to investigate this deliberative phenomenon because *The Onion* relies so heavily on ambiguity in order to construct an ironic meaning, an ambiguity that is similarly used by political communication scholars to evaluate partisan responses to news stories (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). By mimicking the rhetorical form of news stories and ironically adopting an oppositional position articles from *The Onion* were able to essentially puncture these echo chambers. While these intrusions were inevitably neutralized, they nevertheless serve an important rhetorical function. Irony and satire remain in a unique position to accurately characterize discursive positions in a manner that is indistinguishable from their literal counterparts. Information and mis-information somehow exist simultaneously. In this sense the role of irony and satire are refashioned to address the challenges posed by newer media (Bolter & Grusin, 2000). From a theoretical standpoint I remain convinced this conclusion is important.

However, while I think the analysis of ironic remediated texts remains quite strong in I remain mindful of the larger political contexts in which this analysis is positioned. The analysis in Chapter 4 serves to illustrate how irony works to tease out larger issues of political partisanship and misinformation in online discourse, yet the role such analysis plays in envisioning new modes of democratic participation remains limited. As the analysis in this chapter suggests, teasing out unintended ironies for the sake of hypermediated observation of a rhetorical phenomena offers little more than the textual "wink" shared between rhetor and audience. While able to puncture the echo chambers of those who interpret ironic cues as literal ones, this analysis serves as a further confirmation of a communication phenomenon documented by other scholars. As a scholarly endeavor this confirmation works to extend research on public deliberation and information seeking on the Internet. As a mode of political intervention this analysis would seem to suggest that readers of these texts are given little more than a chance to laugh, along with a chance to share this laugh with their own social networks.

In Chapter 5 I noted the Twitter account @BPGlobalPR was able to raise money from the sale of merchandise for the purposes of aiding cleanup efforts in the Gulf of Mexico. While this demonstrates how the increased visibility of mediated text through the rhetorical work of irony can foster real material intervention, in this case a monetary one, the discrepancy between the amount of money raised for environmental cleanup and the amount of money continuously used to avoid legal responsibility remains quite vast. There remains the notion that the political possibilities reside in the ability to continuously draw attention to these discrepancies. The focus on visibility remains

important in this context. As I noted in this chapter due to the discrepancy in the amount of followers between @BPGlobalPR and the account it satirizes, @BP_America, remains vast as well, albeit in a different direction. Given Jodi Dean's (2002) argument that publicity is the currency of the Internet, I would suggest that the ability for satirical texts to achieve such widespread visibility is an indication of their political potential in online contexts.

This potential carried into the analysis of Chapter 6 as well. The hypermediated presence of Occupy Wall Street, as well as its immediate presence, achieved visibility apart from traditional mass mediated outlets. This visibility was achieved in stark contrast to dominant modes of media visibility, indicating the potential for social media forms to foster civic participation and deliberation in ways unavailable in the corporate controlled news media. I illustrated how online deliberation regarding OWS revolved around the adaptation of a series of tropes, with those tropes manifesting in a multitude of texts in a multitude of configurations, worked to stress these differences, as well as their relational qualities, in several instances. I argued this work was illustrative of the potential new media outlets hold for refashioning possibilities for democratic deliberation in ways not previously available with older media forms. The stark contrast between how mass media outlets reported on the protests and how the protests were articulated through social media should suggest as much. This also means the role of irony may change along with the change in media paradigms. If one is to buy my argument that refashioned media forms refashion the discursive possibilities of those new forms then the role of irony may be similarly refashioned. That is, while irony remains part of a robust public

sphere, as the mediating forms used to communicate with one another change so too might the role of irony. However, that is not the same thing as arguing irony has no place in a refashioned public sphere, nor does it mean that irony constitutes a sense of detachment from the "real" work of deliberation. I argue quite the opposite. Instead, the incorporation of ironic interpretations of new media texts can serve to highlight how the texts that comprise one's rhetorical environment are increasingly relational and increasingly occupy the same discursive space.

Yet that assertion requires a major word of caution. Just as scholars have warned against the utopian democratic vision of new media technologies (Palczewski, 2001) so too must I caution against a purely ironic approach to democratic deliberation. I am not privileging the ironic as the preferred mode of deliberation. In a similar analysis of how the rhetoric of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert employs a refashioned conception of public journalism I addressed the question of whether or not humor, satire, and irony should be principles we should teach in journalism schools (Faina, 2013). I answered no.[66] Similarly, I cannot honestly claim that irony, humor, satire, and the like are the only effective counters to the major political issues manifested in a remediated public sphere. My analysis in Chapters 5 and 6 made such limitations clear in the context of late capitalism. I do not intend to place irony as the preferred mode of discursive action in contemporary media structures, even it is the one that I myself prefer when participating in my own online networks. Instead it is my hope that I have made clear the idea that the

[66] Though a colleague of mine noted that while in a journalism graduate program at Columbia University one of his professors suggested he re-engineer headlines from *The Onion* in order to learn the format of effective copy writing.

use of irony as a rhetorical strategy works as a counterpart to other modes of deliberation. In Chapter 1 I introduced several ways in which communication scholars, journalists, and media critics characterized irony as a rhetoric of detachment. While I certainly agree that irony can foster a cynical distance from a situation I do not agree that distance is the same as detachment. As noted in Chapter 6 the original conception of the public sphere of deliberation relied on a rather artificial distinction between what Garnham characterized as the "rhetorical and playful aspects of communication" that neglect the link, "between citizenship and theatricality" (1992, p. 360). In this dissertation I offered the trope of irony as a way to account for the link between these rhetorical and playful aspects. In online contexts rhetoric has become increasingly fragmented and intertextual, demanding a need to negotiate an increasingly complex symbolic environment. As public deliberation continues to adapt to this reality I argue an ironic sensitivity to this discursive arena is important. Characterizing irony as a mode of distancing would undercut such work. I have not argued that irony become the preferred method of public deliberation in the current media age. Rather I worked to place irony as a particularly fruitful way to participate in a mediated discursive arena where multiple individuals, institutions, and organizations increasingly occupy the same hypermediated space.

The increased sensitivity to the rhetorical structure of contemporary public discourse offered by irony and remediation is not without its limitations. Several of those limitations were offered in relation to specific case studies and briefly revisited in this section. Irony remains perhaps forever tied to a history of mockery, a history that has been used to exclude as much as include. Likewise remediation rests on a few

problematic assumptions that denote similar limitations in the rhetoric of humor. In the next section I identify some of these lasting rhetorical complications.

RHETORICAL LIMITATIONS

The answer to my third research question highlights a strong potential for irony to act as a mode of deliberation that is of increasing value in contemporary public discourse. Remediation provides a necessary compliment to the refashioned possibilities of civic participation because of the ways it enables a greater understanding of the interplay of media forms. However there remain several lasting rhetorical complications of such contributions. There are three specific limitations addressed in this section. The first involves an unacknowledged blind spot embedded in the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy. The second limitation involves ongoing cultural concerns regarding gender in contemporary humor. Third, the exclusionary element of irony relates to a larger concern over socioeconomic disparities in Internet access.

First, remediation rests in part on the perpetuation of patriarchy. Bolter and Grusin acknowledge, "the implications of gender for our understanding of remediation" (2000, p. 78), citing the gendered male gaze as an example. Noting that multiple artistic works cited as exemplars of remediation rely on the presence of the male gaze they argue that such concerns remain embedded in the process of remediation. Citing landmark works of Renaissance linear perspective as examples, they admit, "the possibility that technologies of transparent immediacy based on linear perspective, such as perspective painting, photography, and film, or computer generated graphics and virtual reality, may

all be enacting the so-called male gaze, excluding women from full participation as subjects and maintaining them as objects" (79). The logic of immediacy in particular, understood as the desire to "get beyond the medium to the objects of representation," (83) may rest on a notion of voyeurism that is similar to the gaze observed by feminist film critics. Bolter and Grusin specifically reference arguments made by Laura Mulvey in the 1970s regarding the remediated logic of film, wherein "both the camera work and the narrative structure cause the viewers to identify with the usually male main character and to join him in his visual examination of women" (80). If the ideologies inherent in the material and social conditions that enable the development of a technology are embedded in that technology then it stands to reason that the new media forms examined enact a remediated form of the male gaze.

Bolter and Grusin do not discount such implications. However, they do highlight the gendered gaze enacted by the logic of immediacy are tempered by the self-reflexive logic of hypermediacy. Since hypermediacy is expressed through a "frank acknowledgment of the medium and is not based on the perfect visual re-creation of the world," (2000, p. 81) multiple subject positions can be observed through interaction with the same medium. Furthermore, the level of interactivity found in Internet media suggests, "these media can change their point of view in response to the viewer or user" (81). In this context, hypermediacy can be understood as the self-reflexive counterpart to immediacy. Yet, though remediation contains this self-reflective component in the logic of hypermediacy the voyeuristic impulse remains present, though refashioned. Just as no

medium can be fully erased in creating a sense of transparent immediacy, the ideological concerns of a medium persist as it is remediated into other forms.

It is worth noting that notions of gender have been conspicuously absent from this project as well. While important concerns in need of study, they were beyond the scope of this project. My focus in this project was on asserting a specific rhetorical structure underlying public discourse in texts of mass mediated humor, emphasizing rhetorical vocabularies of humor, irony, and satire in the process. The analysis of these texts did work to reveal ongoing ideological concerns in contemporary public discourse, with some ideological concerns receiving more focus than others. Concerns regarding political misinformation, extreme partisanship, and corporate personhood were found to be most prominent. That these texts did not address notions of gender does not mean it does not have an influence. Future scholarly investigations into humor's role in the contemporary media environment should more explicitly take up issues of gender. Since much of the work of this dissertation is to link the process of remediation to the rhetorics of irony and satire such investigations might also consider ongoing rhetorical complications of gender and humor. I now turn toward addressing such considerations.

Second, gendered exclusions remain in contemporary mass mediated humor. Specifically, in a mass mediated context there remain concerns over the presence of female voices in late night comedy. The late night comedy talk show has been a staple of US television for well over 50 years. Political communication and media scholars have studied the form for its contributions to political dialogue, focusing on its ability to reach wide audiences as well as offer complements to mainstream network news programs

(Smith & Voth, 2002; Young, 2006; Young, 2008; Jones, 2008; Xenos & Becker, 2009; Gurney, 2011). Others have noted the ways in which the form has been adapted to a changing media environment, remediated to address the challenges posed by the Internet (Baym, 2009; Faina, 2013) While some scholars have noted the contributions of women in employing humor for the purposes of political participation well before their legal entry into the public sphere (Carlson, 1988) the role of women in contemporary mediated humor remains underexplored. Joanne Gilbert (2004) argues that female comedians have had to work against this marginalizing function of humor for decades. As a more contemporary example I offer recent the recent controversy surrounding the selection of CBS "Late Show" host David Letterman. Critics have stressed the decision to replace Letterman with Stephen Colbert conspicuously ignores the contributions, and more importantly credentials, of a wealth of female comedic voices (Petri, 2014). I agree that such exclusions remain a problem. At the risk of injecting a rather personal opinion into this discussion I argue that Ellen DeGeneres would have been a much better choice to replace Letterman than Colbert. DeGeneres's immensely popular show in particular borrows heavily from social media outlets to refashion the form of the comedic talk show. That a person such as Colbert, whom has only ever appeared on camera "in character," was chosen over the likes of DeGeneres suggests the ongoing persistence of gendered exclusions in late night television comedy, and by extension media.[67] Even as television is remediated to address the challenges posed by Internet, DeGeneres, one of

[67] Petri continues other strong choices for late night network talk show gigs would have been Chelsea Handler, Aisha Tyler, Amy Poehler, and Julie Klausner.

the greatest stand up comedians of all time is still relegated to a time of day synonymous with the domestic sphere of the home. As Nancy Fraser (1992) argued, the expansion of the public sphere simultaneously rested on the exclusion of women relegating them to the domestic sphere. The same can be noted with late night comedic talk shows. [68] Furthermore, despite reports suggesting CBS *Late Late Show* host Craig Ferguson preferred his recent replacement "unquestionably be a female" (Wright, 2014) the network ultimately decided to go with lesser known British actor James Corden. CBS's decision to replace Letterman and Ferguson, both stand up comedians, with Colbert and Corden, both actors, rather than with any of the numerous female comedians currently with their own successful talk shows is quite conspicuous. To borrow an early phrase to describe the cast of *Saturday Night Live* it seems as if these voices are still considered "not quite ready for primetime," much to the detriment of a more inclusive and robust comedic contribution public discourse.

Finally, the exclusionary impulse found in the rhetoric of irony finds a similar counterpart regarding ongoing socioeconomic disparities related to the Internet. As I argued in Chapter 4 the inclusive and relational components of irony also work to exclude those who do not share in the recognition of a discourse as ironic. A similar exclusion can be observed in the socioeconomic disparities regarding Internet access. These exclusions are generally characterized as the "digital divide," meaning that the ability to participate in the discursive possibilities afforded by new media technologies is

[68] Like Rosie O'Donnell before her, and Roseanne Arnold alongside her, DeGeneres comedic talk show is on during the "daytime."

determined largely by one's ability to afford those technologies. This divide is particularly wide among historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups, further highlighting the intersections of race and class. Craig Watkins (2009) writes, "most academic and government study's argued that barriers to the online world were principally economic and educational, which meant inevitably that race was not too far from the mix" (p. 31). The majority of Internet users in the United States still tend to come from privileged economic and education backgrounds, though Watkins argues that disparity continues to dwindle. Despite the ongoing proliferation of the Internet throughout the world there remains a substantial portion of the population without steady access to the Internet. With political participation and economic opportunity increasingly tied to the ability to access the Internet some have asserted Internet access as a fundamental human right, a right now denied to large numbers of people. No matter what rhetorical possibilities may be afforded with the use of irony in mass mediated public discourse, it does no good if an individual does not have access to these discursive arenas.

This concern serves as a necessary caveat to the conclusions offered throughout this dissertation. At the same time one area of hope is offered by the increased mobility of these technologies. As Sheller and Urry (2003) argued the increasingly mobile nature of communication technology continues to complicate notions of public and private, refashioning the discursive possibilities of public deliberation in the process. Watkins (2009) argues one area in which the digital divide has shrunk in recent years is in the spread of mobile phones. Particularly among young people, the use of mobile phones has

spread as mobile phone technologies have become increasingly powerful, portable, and significantly less expensive than desktop or laptop computers. Additionally, a recent Pew Research Study found a majority of individuals now use their cel phones to access the Internet, with an increase in Internet usage among African American and Latino groups (Duggan & Smith, 2013).[69] This trend may offer insight into the possibilities of increased political agency among marginalized groups as public discourse continues to adapt to the Internet. The increased mobility of communication technology manifests rhetorically in the discursive structures developed to address these changes. Twitter for example was developed specifically in relation to the mobile phone. A report from Twitter's own website notes the "140 character limit of tweets was based on text messaging or SMS constraints" (Twitter Advertising, 2013). Furthermore, "sixty percent of our 200 million active users log in via a mobile device at least once a month" (Twitter Advertising, 2013) with these users tending to be younger. While this does not remove the ongoing problem of the digital divide, it does suggest the democratic and participatory potential of these technologies continues to spread.

Further research addressing issues of gender, class, and race in relation to the rhetoric of new media is warranted. When combined with similar investigations into how humor works to simultaneously critique and reaffirm stereotypes among these groups there is much work to still be done. In the next section I offer some additional directions this research can take.

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[69] The Pew Research Internet Project study on cel phone Internet use found 74% of African Americans and 68% of Latinos in the United States use their cel phones to access the Internet.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this section I identify two directions this research can take. The first is primarily critical, a continued call for analysis of race, class, and gender dynamics in online public discourse. The second is pedagogical, focusing on how scholars can work to foster a stronger awareness of the rhetorical environment as constituted through rapidly changing media forms.

First, as previously mentioned further investigations of race, class, and gender in online public discourse are needed. I offer one example here as a way to extend the analysis provided in this dissertation. Several scholars have begun documenting the development of a discursive community on Twitter specifically catering to African Americans identified as "Black Twitter." Andre Bock (2012) argues, "Twitter's discourse conventions, ubiquity, and social features encouraged increased Black participation" (p. 530). He argues this participation makes heavy use of cultural discourse known as "signifyin" (Gates, 1983). This discourse, which relies heavily upon the trope of irony, has proven remarkably adept at refashioning the institutional discursive features of Twitter to carve out "a community constructed through their use of social media by outsiders and insiders alike" (Bock, 2012, p. 530). The creative use of hashtags in particular has been noted for their ability to achieve lasting publicity through the domination of Twitter's "Trending Topics" (McDonald, 2014). One example involved the ability to effectively stop a proposed book deal by one of the jurors in the murder trial of George Zimmerman, the man accused of killing unarmed Black teen Trayvon Martin in 2012. Users were able to track down the Twitter handle of

Zimmerman's literary agent and mobilize thousands of tweets directed toward the publisher in order to cancel the deal. Similar mobilization efforts have used taken a more humorous turn, as in the case #PaulasBestDishes, an ironic hashtag created for the purposes of criticizing profoundly racist statements made by celebrity cook Paula Dean in 2013. Given that more than a quarter of all black Internet users use Twitter, a percentage twice that of white Internet users, (Brenner & Smith, 2013) this group is important. Further research should investigate the rhetorical dynamics of this discursive community, particularly for the ways it uses irony and remediation to constitute what Fraser (1992) terms a "subaltern counterpublic."

Finally, I suggest a pedagogical direction to address the ongoing questions posed by this study. Adhering to the idea that pedagogical implications be a lasting contribution of rhetorical analysis (Brummett, 1984) I identify several ways in which this can be obtained. The first is a greater understanding of how political satire contributes to informing the broader public on media practices. The second is to consider how irony and remediation can be used to foster greater media literacy.

The first way to view the pedagogical potential of the relationships between irony and remediation can be readily observed in contemporary media practices. Specifically with respect to late night political humor there are ample examples suggestive of a refashioned notion of journalism. Geoffrey Baym (2009) has argued that a primary function of both *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* have been to highlight shifts in media paradigms, employing the practice of humor in order to illustrate these shifts. Particularly with *The Colbert Report* Baym notes the show's satirical style functions as a

form of rhetorical criticism of the media that operates in relation to those same media structures. Similarly I have argued for adapting the principles of humor, specifically irony and satire, for the purposes of creating more productive journalistic practices better adapted to the contemporary media environment (Faina, 2013). These practices seem to be working in some contexts. In 2012 Stephen Colbert won a Peabody Award for excellence in broadcasting, his second, for his segments on Super PAC's. His satirical analysis, specifically its murky relationship with cable news outlets, was regarded as one of the most informative explanations of campaign finance law in any medium ("Stephen Colbert Wins Peabody," 2012). Additionally, David Uberti of the *Columbia Journalism Review* (2014) reports *The Daily Show* alumnus John Oliver has provided the most informative treatment of the complex issue of net neutrality of any news outlet, doing so primarily through the use of humor. Again I do not make the claim that such strategies become part of journalism education, as I do not purport to have the education or professional background to make such claims. Rather it bears highlighting that a focus on revealing ideological structures of media and contemporary politics has become a primary goal of political satire.

In addition to changing media paradigms this project could also benefit from understanding differences among various forms of social media. Much of this research worked to identify common rhetorical practices involving the use of irony in new media formats. An area of further exploration would be to document the differences in how information proliferates in different media. While sharing similar rhetorical characteristics that are continuously remediated, the uses of various social media outlets

differ based on how users encounter information. For example, a Facebook newsfeed relies on a different computer algorithm than does a Tumblr newsfeed or a Twitter newsfeed. Accounting for these differences might have provided extra insight into the discursive practices unique to each medium. Though a central argument of this dissertation is that these media do not operate in isolation, it is my hunch that the types of humor that proliferate on Facebook are ones from more closely knit social networks than those that proliferate on Twitter. Many of the posts examined in Chapter 4 were ones shared by individuals within one's own newsfeed, a phenomenon that did not occur in the same way in the tweets examined in Chapter 5. The rhetorical significance of this investigation lies in understanding how differences in algorithmic constructions of information are accompanied by differences in discursive practice in each medium. The rhetorical significance of this study would be on documenting how the differences in algorithm contribute to different discursive actions.

An area where further research can be of more explicit pedagogical use is in media literacy. In the early formative stages of this dissertation I considered establishing media literacy education as a primary feature of this project. In the interest of manageability and scope I opted to limit such discussions in order to focus on a more rhetorical analysis. Nevertheless I wish to return back to this discussion as a way of concluding this dissertation. Gray, Jones, & Thompson (2009) contend parody by nature is a "media literacy educator" (p. 18). Kathleen Tyner explains that media literacy is the term most often associated with "media education for youth" that "recognizes that new communication devices represent an extension of paper and pen, with all the social

capital, liabilities, competing values, an access issues that have been long associated with traditional literacy skills" (2010, pp. 2-3). In being able to recognize the rhetorical play on form audiences are thus able to recognize the difference structuring elements of those forms. Similar ideas can be adapted for irony and remediation. I have previously argued that much of the work of irony, comedy, and satire in the media environment characterized as "post-9/11" should be understood in the context of media literacy (Faina, 2012). Since irony, and by extension humor, is prevalent in so many texts that become highly visible in remediated public discourse it may be worth incorporating these principles into media literacy education. As media literacy scholar Asa Berger argues, "Humor has a role in everything, so it is quite natural that it would have a role in cultural politics, and it certainly does with pedagogy" (2011, p. 238). In my own approach to teaching I have incorporated principles of humor in a variety of contexts. *The Colbert Report* is often used in conjunction with lessons in effective online research skills in my own classes. I have participated in research projects incorporating principles of improvisational comedy into various communication courses. Many of the texts examined and theoretical issues explored throughout this dissertation have formed the basis of class lectures on public discourse in a new media setting. What I consider a fundamental principle of humor, that the ability to play with a concept signals a heightened grasp of that concept, is at play in all of these practices.

An additional pedagogical component I would like to explore with respect to irony, remediation, and media literacy involves historical understandings of media. As I've stressed throughout this dissertation remediation is fundamental characteristic

informing the development of all media (Bolter & Grusin, 2000). Another major area to explore is how to understand how these discourses go viral, circulating widely throughout the Internet. The notion of circulation is key to understanding rhetorical discourse via the Internet because of its own reliance on electronic circuits. In tracing the rhetorical history of the public lecture circuit known as the lyceum Angela Ray (2005) notes the material, technological, and political conditions of the nineteenth century, "illustrates a process of expansion, diffusion, and eventual commercialization" (p. 2) that played out in a dialectic of education and entertainment. As various speakers "circulated" around the United States, aided by expanding transportation networks, their ideas similarly circulated, offering an early glimpse at the interplay of information and entertainment that "gradually metamorphosed into commercial entertainment" (p. 3). This circulation persists in a remediated form on the Internet today. Much of the infrastructure of the Internet, that is the physical materials and electronic circuits through which web traffic inevitably travels, are located in the same transportation hubs characteristic of the development of the intercontinental railroad and interstate highway system. The computer circuits that compose the material structure of the Internet can be considered remediated versions of transportation networks that were previously used to circulate ideas and foster political participation. These refashioned circuits even rely on a binary system, with a dialectic pairing of 1s and 0s understood only in relation to one another. This final component remains in the preliminary stages of inquiry. Yet I find that such inquiries hold immense potential to demonstrate how the rhetorical tradition is

remediated through the development of new media, with irony proving a noteworthy complement to such development.

CONCLUSION

At this point I hope the reader of this dissertation has a fuller understanding of what it means to characterize new media as a "joke." In positing an intentionally ironic statement it is my hope that the presence of irony in contemporary public discourse need not be considered detached or cynical. Rather I conclude the opposite. My focus on the rhetorical study of humor has been a central feature of my scholarly career to this point. The ability to uncover a deeper meaning embedded in the use of language, and to share that meaning with others, is common to both the study of rhetoric and the practice of humor. In studying humorous texts I have found the techniques of effective joke telling are remarkably similar to the practices of rhetorical criticism. Rather than work to separate the two I instead preferred to combine them in order to understand how they might form a mutually influential relationship. At times this relationship is problematic. But the vocabularies associated with humor explored in this dissertation have offered an intriguing perspective on how public discourse works in the Internet age. What I have found is the Internet functions much like a joke. The playful and skillful adaptation of media forms appears remarkably similar to the practices of humor. These practices are not without their shortcomings, but they have rhetorical value. Freud (1960) argued the cognitive work of humor is akin to the work of dreams in the unconscious. If the Internet is considered a technologically mediated collection of human ideas, organized in a

complex web of networks in which billions of humans participate, irony provides a way of sifting through that web. In the interest of using the rhetorical possibilities made possible by this web to create a more informed and more just world it will help to continue working on a better punchline.

Appendix A: Web Images of Literally Unbelievable

Example screenshots of each article cited in Chapter 4:

1.

2.

3.

M

What will we really find out about him in the long run. The Onion is a liberal blog that got this incredible news story out recently. This is another example of the liberal press failing to vet Obama back in 2007-2008. Now they are trying to soften the shock. He hides everything, what's next?

Obama's 19-Year-Old Son Makes Rare Appearance At DNC
www.theonion.com
CHARLOTTE, NC—The first family has turned more than a few heads at this week's Democratic National Convention,

4.

H
6 hours ago

Paul Ryan Knocks Change Cup Cup Out Of Homeless Ohio Veteran's Hands

> Update: Paul Ryan Knocks Change Cup Out Of Homeless Ohio Veteran's Hands
>
> Full Report: http://onion.com/PUBIWt

Share

K likes this.

S You sure he's a vet?...Many are not vets but say they are for money. And many that say they are homeless are not.
2 hours ago · 2

S And if his cup dropped, it's not a big deal. Just pick it back up
2 hours ago · 2

5.

D shared a link via D
Sunday

Media Having Trouble Finding Right Angle On Obama's Double-Homicide
www.theonion.com

WASHINGTON—

Like · Share

M likes this.

D what ever happened with this story....!!
Sunday at 11:59am · Like

C was wondering how credible this site is, seems kind of extreme even for ovomit. couldn't really find the actual story
Sunday at 12:09pm · Like

D the media buried it is why you can't find it.....
Sunday at 12:11pm · Like · 1

C So did he actually pull trigger?
Sunday at 12:18pm · Like

D I am hoping some one knows more on this...I put it out there for people to research it...
Sunday at 12:20pm · Like · 1

6.

J
3 hours ago

Did You Know: Mitt Romney played Roseanne's boss for half a season on the hit sitcom 'Roseanne'?

Watch The Onion Voter's Guide: http://onion.com/QVWoIP

Share

D likes this.

S I totally remember that, now that you jar my memory banks!!! I KNEW I had seen him before some where other than just on the political scene. :)
3 hours ago

7.

D shared a link.
9 minutes ago

Poor taste by The Onion. It's too soon to be making fun of Michael Phelps' death.

Phelps Drowns
www.theonion.com

LONDON—American swimmer Michael Phelps, who earned 21 medals and became the most decorated Olympian of all time, drowned Saturday while competing in the last scheduled

Like · Comment · Share

2 people like this.

M yeah i thought it was poor form
9 minutes ago · Like

8.

C
What a shame we are losing our history...

New Study Finds 85% Of Americans Don't Know All The Dance Moves To National Anthem
www.theonion.com
BOSTON—According to a survey published Wednesday by historians at Boston University, more than 85 percent of

8 hours ago ·

B likes this.

S Get out of here, this is some kind of Joke! I dont ever remember learning "dance Moves" to the SSB? the only people I have ever seen "dancing" to the SSB were cheerleaders, and by listinging to the description of the writer, thats what it sounds like. the only moves that I know of that you are suppose to do is stand, remover your hat and place your right hand over your heart?
2 hours ago

9.

P

WOW - I thought there were two suns in that fire picture I took! Awesome - no mention, tho, if it was a brown dwarf!

Scientists Trace Heat Wave To Massive Star At Center Of Solar System

www.theonion.com

PASADENA, CA—Groundbreaking new findings announced Monday suggest the record-setting heat wave plaguing much of the United States may be due to radiation emitted from an enormous star located in the center of the solar system.

4 hours ago · Share

5 likes this.

P

Here it is again.

Wall Photos

I got a few pictures on my cell.

By: P

4 hours ago · Share

5 likes this.

M oh my goodness, that's crazy

2 hours ago

P Freakin' awesome! I can't believe I got this.

2 hours ago

P Earlier comment on the actual page doesn't show up here: Just found out it is TWO OF THEM! Cause of our heat wave!

2 hours ago

M that is insane. it's like something out of star wars

2 hours ago

P Micah, you really should look at some of the links on my page TODAY. There's some really interesting stuff happening.

2 hours ago

P ESP. The Quickening!

2 hours ago

M wow, a massive star in our solar system. this is literally insane

2 hours ago · 1 person

10.

Steven Chu shared a link.
5 hours ago

I just want everyone to know that my decision not to serve a second term as Energy Secretary has absolutely nothing to do with the allegations made in this week's edition of the Onion. While I'm not going to confirm or deny the charges specifically, I will say that clean, renewable solar power is a growing source of U.S. jobs and is becoming more and more affordable, so it's no surprise that lots of Americans are falling in love with solar.

Hungover Energy Secretary Wakes Up Next To Solar Panel
www.theonion.com

WASHINGTON—Sources have reported that following a long night of carousing at a series of D.C. watering holes, Energy Secretary Steven

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